

# PC ZONE

## ROME: TOTAL WAR

The greatest strategy game of all time!

**PREVIEWED!**

**MANHUNT**  
**THE MOVIES**  
**EVIL GENIUS**  
**UEFA EURO 2004**  
**CITY OF HEROES**

**REVIEWED!**

**BREED**  
**SACRED**  
**UNREAL II: XMP**  
**DESERT RATS**

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shooters through their paces

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PRESS!**  
**PARIAH**  
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MAKERS OF UNREAL  
TOURNAMENT!

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### SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

The FPS mutates...  
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**DEFINITIVE REVIEWS!**

## SPLINTER CELL 2

### BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

**PLUS...**

## BLUE VAULT

World's first look at  
the sci-fi epic from the  
makers of Republic

[www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk)



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what Championship Manager did for footy.”**

**PC Gamer, March 2004**

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## AsSIMilate



*The Sims*. Loathed by many, yet seemingly bought by every single person in the entire world (twice), there's no doubting its credentials as a gaming phenomenon. If you're a regular reader, you'll know we've been running an anti-*Sims* campaign for a while now, but something happened recently to make me rethink: I phoned home to see what my eight-year-old niece wanted

for her birthday. Now, bearing in mind that previous years' wish lists have combined to make for very depressing reading – "a Barbie doll, a princess costume, anything pink and ballet shoes" – it was with no little joy that I received the words "she'd love a copy of *The Sims*". Apparently, she'd played it round a friend's house, got hooked and now wanted her own copy.

We're always bemoaning the fact that not enough women are into games, not least because it makes it almost impossible to hold down a relationship with someone of the opposite sex and spend the majority of your free time in front of your monitor playing games. Well, this could be the solution. Start 'em young on something like *The Sims*, get them hooked on the pleasures of gaming, then start feeding them ever more addictive substances. Eventually, they'll love action adventures, RPGs, first-person shooters and possibly even *Pro Evolution Soccer*. It's a big opportunity to make the world a better place and it's your responsibility to help make it happen.

If *The Sims* does kickstart a new generation of female gamers, I'll take back everything I've said about it in the past (metaphorically speaking, of course). So, while I can't guarantee that we'll never knock *The Sims* again, or childishly take it out of our Charts for a *Sims*-free month, I can say hand on heart that there is a role for it to play in life. Now, where's my copy of *Pro Evo*?

Dave Woods  
Editor

PS – I can't go this month without telling you about something massively exciting we've got lined up for next month. Some may follow in our wake, others may try to pre-empt us by regurgitating old material, but only one magazine is going to be first with the answer to the question everyone's been asking: how good is *Half-Life 2*?



## ROME: TOTAL WAR P32

It's the greatest strategy game of all time!  
Find out why in our exclusive preview...

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### ■ FIVE EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...

Another huge single-player level from the greatest shooter ever, *Far Cry*, plus *kill.switch*, *Beyond Divinity*, *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps* (multiplayer) and *Savage*.

### ■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

*Unreal II: XMP Community Pack*, plus demos of *Gangland*, *Spellforce* and *Warlords Battlecry III*.





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# PCZONE

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On sale April 29. Cos it's like that.



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**WIN!** **TINY COMPO** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (141), PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BO. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: April 28, 2004. The winner of our March Tiny Compo (139) is Richard Cave from Somerset, who gets lots of lovely PC-related goodness sent to his door for knowing who Peter Molyneux is. Well done Richard, you are truly wonderful.

**GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS:** 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Dennis or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew! 9. Text competition entries: In order to enter this issue's competition, you should send the keyword (for example, PCZTINY), to 83125. Misspell keywords will not be counted. All competition entries for this issue must be received by April 28, 2004. Dennis Publishing will not be liable for any delays in the receipt of any SMS messages as delivery is subject to effective transmission from your network operator. Texts will cost 50p plus your standard operator (text messaging) charge. Upon closure of this issue's compo, Dennis Publishing will have no further obligation thereafter to forward any unread or unsent messages to user or any other party. By replying YES, you agree to receive further text messages from PC ZONE and other Dennis Publications regarding future services and promotions, as well as market research run or conducted by Dennis Publishing and other related or associated businesses. You can unsubscribe at any time by replying STOP to any message received.



**FIRST  
Look!**

**Football's coming home...**

# UEFA EURO 2004



**EA Sports hopes to cash in on England's forthcoming success in Portugal. Or not**

**TICKETS NEEDED:** Steve Hill

## ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

**PUBLISHER** EA Sports  
**DEVELOPER** EA Sports  
**EXPECTED RELEASE DATE** May 7  
**WEBSITE** [www.uk.ea.com](http://www.uk.ea.com)

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The official game of Euro 2004
- Extensive Euro Coach mode
- New skill moves
- Dynamic player morale system

**"Some epic battles are expected and pundits are also hoping for a couple of decent football matches"**

**YOU KNOW** the form by now: a new FIFA game every year and a 'special' one every other year for either the World Cup or the European Championships. Naturally, it's the latter that concerns us here, as Europe's finest (and Latvia) gear up for the impending festivities in Portugal. Some epic battles are expected, and pundits are also hoping for a couple of decent football matches. While the TV screens will inevitably be filled with drunken pondlife spitting hate in Hackett, Burberry and Clone Island, *UEFA Euro 2004* will eschew the garden furniture and water cannon in favour of the football.

From the same Canadian stable as the absurdly successful FIFA games, a separate 30-strong development team has put *Euro 2004* together, presumably leaving the rest of the robots to concentrate on FIFA 2005. To claim that it's a wholly different game would be a lie though, as this is simply FIFA 2004 six months down the line with a Euro flavour.

## FOOT IN MOUTH

Clearly aimed at the mass market, EA is happy to admit that it's attempting to ensnare Euro-crazed football fans. In a somewhat Ratner-esque statement, a senior marketing executive openly proclaimed: "I want to be honest with you and say that this game is not going to be a PES-beater – it's not even going to necessarily be a FIFA-beater." As for the good news, it promises to be "the deepest event-product we've ever brought to release", the idea being that once you've seen the match and got the shirt, you buy the game.

To that end, it will replicate the Euro 2004 experience in extreme detail. It's not



**He couldn't stop a pig in a corridor.**

just about the final stages in Portugal, as the Euro Coach mode will enable you to take charge of any of the 51 nations that took part in the qualifying campaign and steer them towards the promised land. Over a maximum of 29 games, this will cover friendlies, qualifiers and hopefully the finals themselves. During the 18-month campaign, squads can be selected from 40 or so players, although injuries, personal issues and even club versus country rows will impact on their availability.

## IT'S NOT IN THE GAME

On the pitch, EA is claiming upwards of ten new context-sensitive skill moves, including nutmegs and Ron Atkinson's perennial favourite, the lollipop. Throw in

fake shots, diving headers, bicycle kicks, chip shots and a new crossing model, and you could be forgiven for thinking that it sounds like a more arcadey experience. However, our extensive playtest of the alpha code proved otherwise, and it seemed to be little more than a slightly slicker version of the previous FIFA.

Of course, *Euro 2004* will also have an online mode, as with previous FIFA titles, featuring various multiplayer options for you to thrash. Hopefully, the slew of new game modes will ensure *Euro 2004* is worth checking out – and while there's no doubting the authenticity of the game, we can only hope the boys get it right on the pitch come this summer. [E]



**He may be the world's greatest footballer, but he's got Friar Tuck's hairstyle.**



**Back of the net!**





Real men don't hold hands.

#### TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER

Full weather effects are being introduced to reflect the time and place, be it a chilly qualifier in Slovakia or a steamy semi in Lisbon.

#### STAR HEADS

The most famous players will have their heads accurately modelled. That said, Steven Gerrard appeared to have been replaced by Robbie Williams.

#### SITUATION

The Situation mode will let you set up specific scenarios, such as being two down in the final with half an hour to go.

#### LET'S ALL CHANT

A host of country-specific chants will be audible during the relevant games. EA is a family company though, so nothing too filthy.

#### FANTASY FOOTBALL

Essentially a glorified schoolyard pick, the Fantasy mode will enable you to select a dream team of Europe's finest to go up against either the computer or a friend.

#### MIND GAMES

Players will have a State Of Mind rating that will directly affect their performance. For instance, if you take the captaincy off Beckham, he'll be spewing.



Video killed the snuff movie star...

FIRST  
Look!

# MANHUNT

First PC screenshots from Rockstar's grisly stealth game

PSYCHO KILLER: Jamie Sefton

## ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

**PUBLISHER** Rockstar  
**DEVELOPER** Rockstar North  
**EXPECTED RELEASE DATE** April  
**WEBSITE** [www.rockstargames/manhunt](http://www.rockstargames/manhunt)

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the makers of the GTA series
- Stealth game with unprecedented levels of violence
- Gruesome videotaped murder cut-scenes
- Atmospheric, with superb voice-acting and music

**"Manhunt has some of the most twisted characters you'll ever meet"**



**YOU CAN** feel your heart pounding a desperate rhythm as you see the gang member approach your hiding place in the shadows. Quiet. He's straining his ears, listening for any sound that will alert him to your position in the room. "Ah, shit. Must've been nuthin'," says the scar-faced enemy, wheeling around and slowly making his way back to his lookout position. You seize the moment, carefully stalking your prey, closing up behind him. A voice in your headset whispers: "Do it!" The metal baseball bat swings and meets the soft head of your enemy with a loud crack, splitting open its contents. The lifeless body of the guard slumps to the floor. You hear cold laughter in your earpiece. "Good, good!"

This is *Manhunt*. If you're the kind of person who flinches at the headshots in *Unreal Tournament 2004*, or screws up your face in disgust when a friend runs over an innocent pedestrian in *GTA: Vice City*, you might as well stop reading now and go back to watching *Heartbeat*. *Manhunt* is graphic in its depiction of violence – it's certainly the most shocking we've seen in a commercial title. However, Rockstar's latest is also a stealth game with a uniquely dark atmosphere, unforgettable set-pieces, smart voice-acting and some of the most twisted characters you'll ever encounter.

## VIDEO NASTY

You play anti-hero James Earl Cash, a man sentenced to death for an unspecified crime. However, instead of meeting your fate on death row, you awake in the hell-hole of Carcer City, USA. Surviving this urban death-maze packed with psychotic gangs and government agents is now your only goal. To help you do this,



**Manhunt is full of genuine shocks.**

you have to listen to the voice in your earpiece provided by the mysterious Lionel Starkweather, a sick puppy who makes snuff films – and yes, you happen to be the new star attraction.

## GORE BLIMEY

*Manhunt* is a stealth game, so you must progress through the level or scene by lurking in the shadows, luring foes into secluded places away from compadres by making suspicious noises and then hopefully dispatching of them quietly. What's so disturbing is that you're rewarded by the speed and deadliness of your kills, which have three levels of intensity – hasty, violent and gruesome.

For example, if your weapon is cheese wire and you manage to stalk a victim from behind for several seconds, wait until the marker above their head turns

from white, to yellow, to red, then you can pull off a hideous videotaped cut-scene, where you see the head aggressively cut from their body. You can then use the severed bonce as a distraction for other gang members, who'll start to panic when they see their ex-colleague not exactly in the best of health.

If you're a regular reader of *PC ZONE*, you'll know that stealth games aren't my favourite genre – the run-and-gun bullets-flying approach of titles such as *Painkiller* or *Call Of Duty* are much more instantly gratifying. Yet with *Manhunt*, the stealth element is backed up by some serious hardware in later levels, demonstrating further that this murder sim is a welcome, if decidedly sick take on other third-person classics such as *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty* and *Splinter Cell*. Just don't tell the *Daily Mail*... [M]

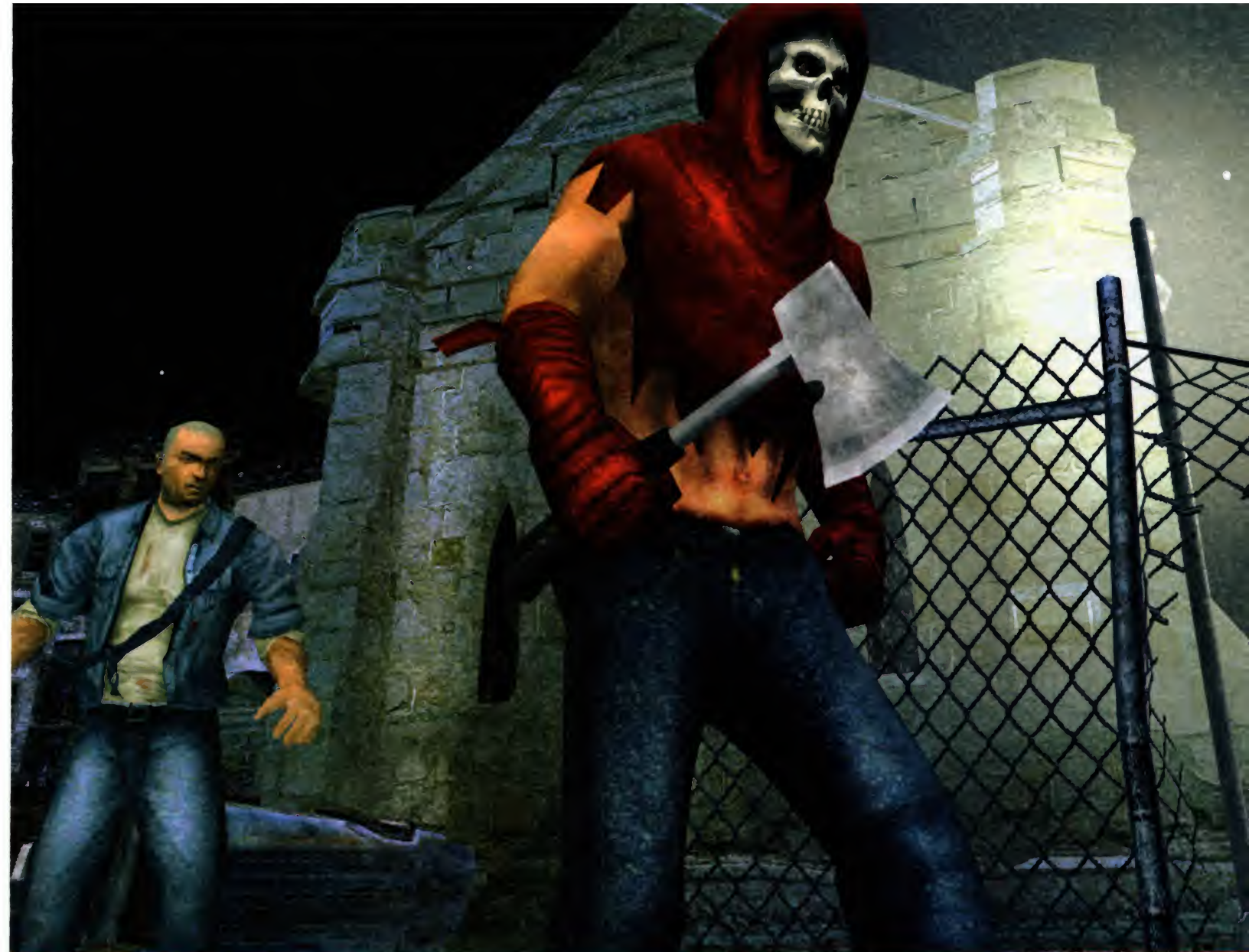


**James Earl Cash – not a man you should bump into in a public toilet.**



**He likes to kill.**





"Nice axe!" Stealth is always the best option, so if discovered, run and hide quickly – or expect to fight for your life.

#### GRAPHICS

Rockstar has excelled in creating the seedy, urban, rat-infested surroundings of Carcer City. Also, the motion-captured death-throes of your splattered enemies is realistic and deeply unpleasant.

#### SOFTLY, SOFTLY

You have to be wary of different surfaces causing more noise to alert enemies – gravel and woodchips are materials to avoid walking on when danger is near.

#### GANG BANG

The gangs in Carcer City differ greatly in their appearance and nastiness, ranging from white supremacists The Skinz and the machete-carrying mask-wearing The Smileys.

#### WEAPONS

Cash can pick up and use various one-off weapons such as plastic bags for suffocation, and machetes, baseball bats and other brutal equipment. In later levels, he can also get guns.

#### HEADSET

Unfortunately, Rockstar's missed a trick on the PC. If you're playing on PS2 or Xbox with a headset, you get Starkweather whispering in your ear, adding to the tension. But not on PC. Shame.

#### KILLS ON FILM

Every kill you pull off is shown in the style of a nasty, lo-fi videotape cut-scene, complete with picture interference and blood splashes on the camera lens.





ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

# BULLETIN

n00b  
NEWS



■ NEWS WRITER Will Porter

▲ It's been an odd month. First, some sort of gravitational flux left in the wake of Korda's bulk departing the office sucked me into the front of the magazine. Initially, this filled me with delusions of grandeur, but that only lasted half an hour before being informed that my first duty as news writer would be to don fake breasts and pout at a camera for our new regular feature Search For a Game (page 25). Needless to say, my mother is very proud.

So far, being a news writer is similar to being a staff writer, although now I'm in charge of something that isn't a chart, a list or a beverage retrieval service, the stakes are somewhat higher. For a while I tried dodging my new authority and hiding under my desk, but the constant fear of discovery led me to see that the best option is to provide a top notch, on the button, moustache-twirling news service instead. You can check out the results, lavishly spread over the next few pages.

I may be more news puppy than news hound, but as the padawan of Master Sefton, I've managed to haul in some tasty treats for you this month.

From the day I got this job, I've been hyped about three games (*Half-Life 2* withstanding): *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines*, *Fallout 3* and *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*. Now, seeing as half-wits have killed off two of these gems, it's a mighty good thing that *Bloodlines* looks set to be a beacon of gaming goodness. Check out my interview with the Troika crew on this page for more. Elsewhere, we've got nuggets on *Freedom Force 2* (page 18), *Pariah* (page 22), a splash of the new *GTA* and regulars *The Man Who Knows* (page 22), *Emulation Zone* (page 17) and *Indie Zone* (page 20). Hope you like it...

## THE LADY IS A

EXCLUSIVE! *VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES* CREATOR TROIKA TALKS BLOOD-LETTING, SOURCE CODE AND *HALF-LIFE 2*!



Sexy woman in FPS shocker!



"Is it just me, or is it hot in here?"

**THE VAMPIRE CIRCUS** and its developer Troika rolled into town recently, and *PC ZONE* leapt at another chance to see the latest code of the roleplay-cum-shooter and bag a chat with Troika's joint-CEO Leonard Boyarsky and executive producer Thaine Lyman.

If you've been wearing garlic and waving crucifixes for the past few months,

*Bloodlines* is where Valve's Source code takes a walk on the wild side – the great goth hope for the RPG genre.

First off, Thaine underlines the fact that *Bloodlines* isn't walking down the same RPG-lite road as *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. "Until now, everyone who's tried to blend FPS and RPG has just had a shooter and then tacked on the role-play element. We're

going the other way – we're RPG from the ground up. All we're changing is the graphics, which are as good as anything else out there, and we're not doing the old-school point-and-click combat – we're more immediate, present and involved."

### HOLLYWOOD HELLRAISER

In the game, you enter the Los Angeles underworld as an illegally sired vamp, a member of the undead fraternity unlicensed by the ruling Prince – a representative of the governmental Vampire Camarilla who treats you rough and forces you to prove your worth. Having chosen a character from one of the seven different clans, you find yourself working out of a dank apartment and doing the Prince's dirty work – checking your email, reading newspapers that feature stories on your potential sub-missions and generally living out a life in vampiric Santa Monica that's as deep as you want it to be.

We saw several new missions and all of them had many and varied gameplay possibilities that demonstrated ingenious ways of blending the Source engine's physics capabilities with traditional FPS gameplay. One scenario sees you traipsing around a house where a father's killed himself and all his family. Your job is to exorcise their ghosts while being bombarded by poltergeist-hurled pots, pans, paintings and exploding kitchen gas fittings. Another mission to grab some explosives from some street punks was completed several times through stealth, distraction via throwing physics objects around the level, sweet-talking, violence and wandering around boiling hoodlum's bloodstreams and making them explode.

What becomes immediately apparent is that *Bloodlines* is going to be an extremely



Behind you matey...





**SPECIAL REPORT**  
The sound of now



**EMULATION ZONE**  
Nintendo GameCube emulator



**INDIE ZONE**  
Indie games reviewed and rated



**PC ZONE CHARTS**  
Latest charts and release dates

# VAMP



adult game – the superbly acted dialogue is peppered with the foulest of foul words – so are sex and drugs on the menu as well?

"Well, maybe a little sex, maybe a little drugs," says Leonard. "But it's not like you'll see people bumping uglies on camera or

physics and then we saw the facial animation," says Leonard. "We just sat down and said 'we've got to make an RPG with this'. We had the Source engine fall in our lap and knew we had to go with it. Valve gave us the engine, but stuff goes back and

**"When we saw the Source engine, we knew we had to make an RPG with it"**

LEONARD BOYARSKY JOINT-CEO, TROIKA

anything," clarifies Thaine. But this journalist has seen characters like Jeanette – owner of a Vamp nightclub, bloody-mouthed sex-pot and self-proclaimed 'name on all the mens room walls'. On this evidence, the game looks pretty damn kinky.

## THE SOURCE IS STRONG

So, after deciding to use the *Half-Life 2* engine having been approached by Valve a couple of years ago, how did the *Half-Life 2* leak affect the development of *Vampire*? "It sucked," says Thaine. "It's horrible when people do stuff like that. It pushed us back as it pushed Valve back: we can't finish our engine until they finish theirs."

But the lure of the engine was there from the start. "We were really fired up about the

forth between us. We get updates and our programmers talk to their programmers. It's been a great working relationship."

Thaine is fully aware of the possibility of harnessing the hype surrounding the engine of one of the PC's most eagerly-awaited titles. "As much as we'd like to think that it's because we're such great guys, I'm sure the *Half-Life 2* buzz helps us out a lot!" But from what we've seen, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* looks set to be a fantastic game in its own right. We'll have more as soon as is inhumanly possible...

■ Publisher: Activision  
■ Developer: Troika Games  
■ ETA: Late 2004  
■ Website: [www.vampirebloodlines.com](http://www.vampirebloodlines.com)



Troika used *ZONE* man Chris Anderson as a model for the Nosferatu.

# Vercetti and Hutch?

**WEST COAST LARKS AND LARCENY LINED UP FOR THE NEW GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS**

**THE TITLE OF** Rockstar's next gun-toting opus is *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, with a PS2 release date of October 22 and an as-yet-unconfirmed PC date of early 2005. One of several possible titles that parent company Take Two had trademarked back in December (alongside *GTA: Sin City*, *GTA: Bogota* and *GTA: Tokyo*), *San Andreas* was the second level of the original crime caper. With San Francisco as its clear template, the original *GTA*'s San Andreas featured rich sunny boulevards, grubby docklands, a river crossing not unlike the Golden Gate bridge and warring triad and hispanic factions.

Rumour has it that the setting will be the '70s, and seeing as this is the one decade as yet untouched by the franchise, it's a fairly safe bet (the '60s have been covered in add-on pack *GTA: London*). Expect *Bullitt*-style chases, *Starsky and Hutch* cars, an Alcatraz break-out mission, tram-stealing and a contemporary soundtrack that exudes cool. All this and if the PC version ever crashes, then we get to call it a 'San Andreas Fault'. Thank you ladies and gentlemen, I'll be here all month...

**Grand Theft Auto San Andreas**

■ Publisher: Rockstar  
■ Developer: Rockstar  
■ ETA: 2005  
■ Website: [www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas](http://www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas)



**"Why the PC market sucks..."**

EA's president Bing Gordon, bemoaning the fact that the PC had lost its perception of "leadership" and why gamers see consoles as market leaders... Is the market-glutting Sims franchise really bringing back the edge to PC gaming, Bing?

**"LucasArts' sudden decision to stop production on Sam & Max is mystifying. Sam & Max was on schedule and coming together beautifully. The rug has been pulled out from under this brilliant team who've so expertly retooled Sam & Max for the 21st century."**

Sam & Max creator Steve Purcell vents his anger at the heavy hand of corporate America crushing the aspirations of two clothed animals trying to scrape a living.

**"Yes, there most definitely will be another Battlecruiser game in a few years. It's inevitable."**

We can't quite make out whether Derek Smart is trying to make a promise, a warning or a direct threat. Whichever it is, we're scared.





ILLUSTRATION Henry Obasi

# MINISTRY OF SOUND

Eye-searing graphical effects may grab more headlines, but the use of ultra-realistic sound is an increasingly crucial tool for games developers, reports **Steve Hill**

**A MIDDLE-AGED** man in a hat is blowing into a conch. It's a curious spectacle, but to his credit, he's getting a pretty good sound out of it. As he finishes his baleful lament, he jokes that it's "the wireless model", before hopping on to the stage to deliver a "trans-cultural greeting piece". If the conch trick was absurd, then

as 'The DVD Dream', 'Scoring Interactive Music For Videogames' and 'Computer Games Meet The Film Industry In Lionhead's *The Movies*' (see our preview on page 42), our lecture of interest is entitled 'The Future Of Sound (part one)'. Our host is Martyn Ware, formerly of Sheffield's electro also-rans, Heaven 17.

In 2001, Ware and Erasure stalwart Vince Clarke formed The Illustrious Company, dedicated to pushing the boundaries of sound technology. As Ware announces in his introduction: "We've been making recordings for 25 years, but I can honestly say we've never been so passionate about a subject as we are

**SPECIAL REPORT**

**"Sound effects coming at you from all angles bring the game environment to life in a way that even the prettiest 3D graphics displayed on a flat screen simply can't"**

**PETER HARRISON** SENIOR TECHNOLOGY EVANGELIST, CREATIVE

this is simply risible, largely consisting of wobbling his lower lip with a finger. Nevertheless, the performance is greeted with rapturous applause from the audience at the inaugural BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Festival.

Their idea of interactive entertainment is clearly some distance from ours, and we appear to have been invited by mistake. Lurking among such offerings

However, in spite of the avant-garde installations from Norwegian fisherman, a sound collage of exhausted ballet performers and a series of 'experimental soundworks' by women called Her Noise, (all of which this reporter had to endure over the course of four gruelling hours), the presentation provided some fascinating insights into the future of sound in PC games.

about three-dimensional sound. We're on a bit of a mission to present to the world our heightened reality surround sound system, as we call it. Vince can't be here I'm afraid, as he's recording a new Erasure album in New York – he lives there now – but he sends his love to each and every one of you personally, in a very real way."

The Illustrious Company feels that sound is generally regarded as a poor

relation in the arts, (and of course videogames), with audible solutions to problems parachuted in at the last minute. "This is a great shame, as we can now create ultra-realistic 3D sound fields, which can transport the listener in a totally convincing way. For example, we notice when mixing tracks that high frequency sounds that emanate from a position behind and above the listener cause the hairs on the back of the neck to stand up."

## STAYING ALIVE

Ware and Clarke have developed a theory for these responses – that sound can actually trigger primal feelings of survival deeply buried in our subconscious, when earliest humans had to flee from predators attacking from behind or above.

"Likewise in our 3D mixing experience, low frequency sounds seem to feel more realistic if they appear to be emanating from ground level. Maybe this is an





**Sony's Dave Ranyard (top) and The Illustrious Company's Martyn Ware offer some sound advice at the recent BAFTA Interactive Festival.**

ancient danger response to vibrations carried through the earth," continues Ware. Such sound 'triggers' would be immensely scary in a title such as *Doom 3*, where you're literally being hunted through the game.

It's an interesting theory, and one echoed by New York sound installation artist Charles Morrow (the man with the conch): "As sound recording has evolved, we've come to 3D sound where we take advantage of the drama associated with the Z-axis. Sound artists take advantage of the fear of something creeping up behind us, dropping in from above, coming up from under the ground or the ground opening up beneath us."

### HEARING IS BELIEVING

No matter how realistic graphics become, there's always going to be a leap between realism and what's on your monitor (including the fact that it's actually on a monitor). However, the nature of sound means that the scope for realism is far greater, and this is increasingly being used in PC games, with home systems being created to rival those on display at BAFTA.

Dave Ranyard, a sound designer at Sony, also spoke at the lecture about the importance of 3D sound for the future of videogames. "More and more people are getting 5.1 systems at home and then they'll get 7.1 systems – people do want this fully immersing environment. Just as computer graphics improve all the time, the audio playback improves too. In the not too distant future, I can see it being very standard to have a 5.1 system and all games running in 5.1."

Having recovered from the BAFTA experience, we tracked down the senior technology evangelist at Creative, Peter Harrison (no relation to the Brookside rapist of the same name), and asked him what part sound plays in immersing a player in a game.

"It plays a huge part," claims Harrison. "Game people always talk about the 'suspension of disbelief' – when you're playing a good game and you forget the outside world, you lose yourself in that game. This is impossible without a convincing soundtrack – it's as simple as that. Surround sound is all about putting the player right into the heart of the game world. Sound effects coming at you from all angles bring the game environment to life in a way that even the prettiest 3D graphics displayed on a flat screen in front of your eyes simply can't."

### REACH FOR THE STARS

Looking to the future, Harrison adds: "Audio effects-processing, such as that provided by our EAX 4.0 Advanced HD, is definitely the way forward. Having a wide range of real-time sound processing options means that a game's audio can be tweaked and massaged in countless

**NYC's Charles Morrow. Complete with conch.**

ways, all 'on the fly' during the game. Advanced sound processing opens up almost infinite ways that the developer can play with the game's sound set."

This implies that you'll be able to enjoy a far more dynamic experience than could be generated by just playing back more and more static sound samples. Sounds from different areas in the game world will all be processed differently for a more lifelike and believable environment. "You'll hear more fine detail than ever before – better acoustics, more exciting effects, more sophisticated ambient sounds and more dynamic engine sounds," concludes Harrison. "The sky's the limit!" Sounds good to us. **PCZ**

**YOUR Shout!** Do you think sound is a key component in videogames? Are you creating bold new tunes for games? Write to **PC ZONE** at the usual address and let us know, and check out our *Lionhead Diaries* on page 142.

## SOUND BLASTERS

### FEELING SUPERSONIC? TRY THIS LOT FOR SIZE

Using 3D sound and EAX, a number of developers have recently managed to create audio environments that are extremely immersing. Here are five of the best...



### COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

Sounds just like being in a rally car. Which is handy.



### FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Realistic gunfire in a futuristic New York City? Present and correct.



### HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

So real you can hear him sweating. Almost.



### UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Exceptional surround sound elevates this FPS from the crowd.





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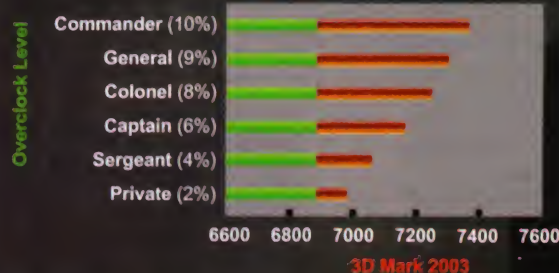


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# EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR STUART CAMPBELL



Full-speed GameCubing fun in *Bust-A-Move*.



Not released in the UK, the ace *Animal Crossing*.

## PROGRESS CUBED

**ALERT** readers will probably recall last month's column, in which this reporter insightfully and informatively noted the way that playable emulation generally follows along about two hardware generations behind the state-of-the-art in current console hardware. Well, if you do recall that, then kindly forget it, because in a *clear and deliberate* attempt to make Emulation Zone look like a stupid idiot (not that tricky, granted), someone's gone and written a Nintendo GameCube emulator.

Now, calm your excitement. Dolphin (for such is its name) is capable of running commercial GC games, but it has very limited compatibility at the moment. The only game you're likely to be able to get running at full speed is

*Bust-A-Move 3000*, though a handful of other games (including *Crazy Taxi*, *Mario* and *Zelda*) run at much slower frame-rates. The emulator is extremely good at handling the GameCube's sound and 2D graphics, but takes a massive hit as soon as the third dimension comes into play. You can see this in action when you run the likes of *Crazy Taxi* – all the menu screens fairly zip along, but it slows to a crawl when the actual game starts.

With the limited compatibility and the impossibility of running your real GC discs in your PC (the emulator needs specially-ripped versions, which will hog 1.5GB of hard drive space per game), Dolphin is strictly a technical showcase

at the moment. But as a first release, it's nothing short of stunning.

What's more, given that there isn't even a sniff of a Dreamcast emulator capable of playing games, never mind ones for PS2 or Xbox, this is perhaps the single most impressive piece of emulation ever. We'll be watching this one like a hawk. **EW**

### LINKS

[www.dolphin-emu.com/](http://www.dolphin-emu.com/)  
– Dolphin homepage

**NEW!**  
ARCHIVE AT  
[WWW.EXCELLENTCONTENT.COM/EMUZONE](http://WWW.EXCELLENTCONTENT.COM/EMUZONE)



**“The emulator is extremely good at handling the GameCube's sound and 2D graphics”**

## WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

## EMULATION OF THE MONTH

**COCK'IN (1985, COMMODORE 64)**

The Commodore 64 is a machine that's been a bit neglected in Emu Zone – so it's about time we put that right. And surely nothing could be more appropriate than doing so by looking at a genre of game which has been overlooked for even longer – the having-sex-with-chickens 'em up. Your reporter first encountered this game on the Spectrum, under the less-entertaining title of *Chickin Chase*. However, it was on the C64 that the taboo of farmyard fornication was first broken by the early pioneers of videogaming. To be fair, it's not as tasteless as it sounds – you do play a rooster, and all the hot chicken-on-chicken action is done behind a curtain. But shagging a chicken is inescapably what this game's all about.

The object is to eat lots of birdseed and worms to get your strength up, then give the chicken missus a good chicken seeing-to. At this point, your good lady wife lays an egg, which you have to protect from foxes, rats, Bill Oddie and the like. As the eggs hatch, you have to keep up the supply by providing plenty more hard lovin', or your other half will come out and whomp you with a rolling pin, just like in real life.

Running effortlessly on quality C64 emulators like VICE or CCS64, *Cock'In* will give you new respect for the hard-pressed, and indeed hen-pecked, life of a rooster. It's a frantic game, and between feeding yourself, protecting your eggs and making quality time for your sweetheart, there's



## COCK'IN



Bizarre box art, with shark.

never a moment's peace. And at the end of it all, someone chops your head off and serves you up in a lemon sauce. Tasty.

### LINKS

[www.lemon64.com/](http://www.lemon64.com/) – download *Cock'In* (legally), and C64 emulators





**Miles Jacobson**  
Managing Director at Sports Interactive

## DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

### What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Football Manager 2005 (alpha), Eastside Hockey Manager (alpha), Championship Manager: Season 03/04 and any online game that involves hitting penguins.

### What was the last videogame you finished?

Probably *Oddworld* on Xbox – I've got a short attention span, so play loads but finish few. I tend to play a lot of different types of games, many of which are unfinishable such as sports games, sim games and the like.

### What's your favourite game of all time?

*Starquake* on the ZX Spectrum – an absolute gem of a game that was up there with any of the Ultimate/Rare games and was a space platform adventure. Currently, *Top Spin* and *Links* are getting played a lot.

### What are you most proud of in your career?

Our new deal with Sega. The first few months of the relationship have been really good, they've got some great ideas and we've got a publisher for the next five years at least, who want to release the games that we make.

### Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

Oliver and Paul Collyer for being thoroughly down-to-earth individuals despite all their success. And they gave me a job!

### What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

Patches and lots of technical support.

### What's your company's philosophy?

Made by sports fans for sports fans. We try to be close to our Web community too and are very much a team – only two people have left the company in the 11 years we've been releasing games.

### What's the best thing about your job?

Getting paid to play our games and people saying nice things about them.

### What's the worst thing about your job?

Lawyers, banks, accountants, budgets and a severe lack of sleep. Although, I think that's the same with most jobs.

### What are you working on at the moment?

Football Manager 2005, Eastside Hockey Manager and lots of things that are as yet unannounced!

### What's the next big thing in PC gaming?

If I knew that, I'd be a very, very rich man indeed. There are lots of games coming out this year that are likely to be massive – *The Sims 2*, *Half-Life 2*, *Duke Nukem Forever*. In the office, the new *Unreal* game is currently very popular too.

# REICH STRIKE

FIRST SCREENS FROM IRRATIONAL'S SUPER-SEQUEL  
– FREEDOM FORCE VS. THE THIRD REICH



Trick or treating, superhero style.



US foreign policy under the microscope.

**KEN LEVINE**, *System Shock 2* mastermind and all-round nice bloke, recently passed on several scraps of wisdom concerning his superhero sequel *Freedom Force Vs. The Third Reich*.

The game, a repeat performance of the cunning mixture of RPG, tactical combat and boys-own derring-do of the original *Freedom Force*, sends its lantern-jawed heroes back in time to combat the Nazis.

"The team's primary objective is to stop Blitzkrieg, defender of the Reich, from

taking over the world (and perhaps, the universe)," explains Ken. "*Freedom Force Vs. The Third Reich* will see the return of many familiar villains, including Nuclear Winter. Blitzkrieg has not only assembled the Third Reich to do his bidding, he's also made alliances with Fortissimo and Red Sun. Together, this 'axis of evil' creates the greatest threat mankind has ever known."

Missions in the game see you storming Berlin to save ancient tomes from being sent to the fires, foraging into Soviet

strongholds and fighting on WWII battlefields. Add to that a plot that'll take you into the bizarre realms of other dimensions and the acute oddness of *Freedom Force Vs. The Third Reich* has certainly piqued our interest. Till next time, super friends...

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Irrational Games
- ETA: Q3/Q4
- Website: [www.irrationalgames.com](http://www.irrationalgames.com)



One of *Shade's* shady characters.



It's like *Worms*, only with more legs.

# Simian Slaughter

CENEGA'S 2004 LINE-UP TO INCLUDE MEN WITH SWORDS AND MONKEYS WITH GUNS

**MONKEY BUSINESS** is afoot with Cenega's fresh roster of titles. Its new line-up features manic baboons, a long ignored commodity in modern gaming, who're finally going to get their big break as some of the starlets of *Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars* – along with aggressive sheep, angry hamsters and pissed-off cows. The *Worms*-style game will see turn-based combat unleashed on a variety of destructible 3D planets and should touch down in September.

Meanwhile, *Shade: Wrath Of Angels* is a melee-based hack 'n' slash affair that spans the modern day, medieval times, ancient Egypt and (amazingly enough) a mystical realm of shadows. With the ability to morph into a big butch demon and some nice shiny swords, it could well be one to look out for come October.

Other games include *The Roots*, an oriental-styled RPG, and the bizarrely titled *Gooka: The Mystery Of Janatris*. But we're just thankful our campaign for more monkeys in games is gathering momentum...



- Publisher: Cenega
- Developer: Mithis Interactive/Black Elemental Studios
- ETA: September/October
- Website: [www.cenega.com](http://www.cenega.com)





You too can dodge bullets in the jungle!

# MASSIVE VIETCONG PC GIVEAWAY!

**A customised Overclockers PC is yours for the taking along with copies of *Vietcong: Purple Haze*!**

**IF YOU'RE MALE**, young-ish and breathing, chances are you like Vietnam films. Heck, you may even like them if you're female too... And seeing as you're reading *ZONE*, chances are you also like computer games. So what are you waiting for? It's time to enter our *Vietcong* PC giveaway!

With its beautiful customised case, the Overclockers PC will make you the envy of your friends: Intel Pentium 4 Northwood 3.0GHz, Sapphire ATI Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB, 1GB RAM, DVD-RW Rewriter and a 17-inch monitor. All this, plus it's far and away the best computer to hide in a jungle or woodland area...

But even if you're not the lucky punter who bags the hardware, fear not: we also have five copies of *Vietcong: Purple Haze* as runners-up prizes – the compilation of the original *Vietcong* game with its spiffy expansion pack *Fist Alpha*. Jungle-based warfare is all the rage these days, so if you've never fought in the foliage, this is the perfect chance to try it out.

## WIN BY TXT!

Alternatively, you can now enter with a text from one of those newfangled mobile devices.

To enter the competition by text, send 'PCZVIETCONG' to 83125, with your answer (a, b or c), plus your full name, age and address.

All text entries must be received by April 28. Messages cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

To win, all you have to do is answer the question below:

**Question:**  
**Who directed *Full Metal Jacket*?**

- A: Francis Ford Coppola
- B: Stanley Kubrick
- C: Michael Winner

Put your answer on a postcard and point it in the direction of *ZONE* HQ!

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■ Terms and conditions: only entries with the question completed and received before the closing date will be entered into the prize draw. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. Multiple entries not allowed. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply – see page 7.



GATHERING

**RUNNERS-UP PRIZES**  
**5 COPIES OF VIETCONG: PURPLE HAZE**

**FIRST PRIZE**  
**OVERCLOCKERS PC**  
WITH VIETCONG  
CUSTOMISED CASE  
**PLUS A COPY OF VIETCONG: PURPLE HAZE**





# Indie Zone

## DRAGGING THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND DEVELOPERS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE LIMELIGHT

**AS SEGA** has recently shown by launching a lawsuit at Acclaim over the uncanny resemblance between *The Simpsons Hit & Run* and *Crazy Taxi*, the issue of plagiarism isn't dead in the world of videogaming – and nowhere is this more acutely felt than on the independent scene.

A huge number of indie titles are still barely concealed unlicensed clones of other people's games, yet rather than condemn

this intellectual piracy, the indie community often reacts with vitriolic defensiveness at anyone who raises the subject. (That is, unless the victim is another indie, as the link below shows.) Keep your eyes peeled for a full-blown Indie Zone investigation, but in the meantime, don't expect to see any blatant rip-offs covered here.

**URL** [www.dexterity.com/forums](http://www.dexterity.com/forums) – Search for thread 'Our game cloned'

## FREE PLAY

### Maziacs PC

(PeeJay's Remakes)



**THE PROBLEM** with unlicensed clones, as noted in the Indie Zone intro, is that all too often the people that make them not only charge money for rip-offs of other people's games, but don't even have the courtesy to acknowledge where they've copied them from. The burgeoning 'remakes' sector is a different kettle of fish altogether. Here, you have coders bringing old games up to date for the modern age for free, as well as openly and properly crediting the original creators by admitting whose game it was in the first place.

This is one of Indie Zone's favourite remakes, right up there with the fantastic *Skool Daze* update *Klass Of 99* (which incidentally has recently been re-released in a Windows version). It's a rewrite of a fondly remembered Don Priestley game from the early days of the ZX Spectrum, in which your intrepid adventurer searches a maze populated by creepy spider-like monsters in search of gold. The Speccy version was famed for the dramatic fight scenes when you encountered one of the Maziacs, and this remake adds its own twist, a nice surprise which Indie Zone won't spoil for you. The game comes with both original-style graphics and a whole range of other selectable skins, and offers both classic and updated gameplay options.

**URL** [www.peejays-remakes.co.uk/](http://www.peejays-remakes.co.uk/) – more remakes by the same author



The original Speccy game, with a horrible Maziac.



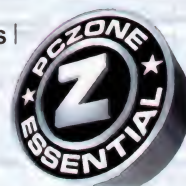
Bosses present the main challenge. Put bluntly.

## AIRSTRIKE 3D

■ £11 (£16.58 with CD) | Dev: Divo Games | [www.divogames.com](http://www.divogames.com)

**REQUIRES** PII 300, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card  
**DESIRES** PIII 500, 96MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

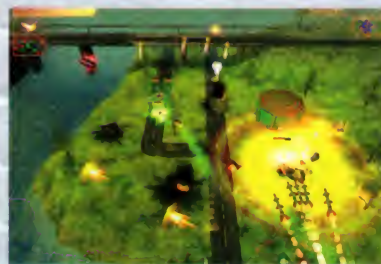
It's a lot less bother with a hover



**THE ON-RAILS** scrolling shoot 'em up is one of the genres that's tragically fallen by the wayside in the modern era of PC gaming. While pyrotechnic 2D blasters like *Shikigami No Shiro* and *Ikaruga* still command niche appeal on consoles, and semi-3D titles like *Zero Gunner* fashion the same gameplay into showcases for modern graphics, the PC has been largely bypassed in the new age of shmups.

Thank Jeebus, then, for the likes of *AirStrike 3D*. Visually reminiscent of EA's *Strike* series of games, this is a no-nonsense helicopter shooter set across 20 levels of implausibly defended river valleys. (It's weird when games like this put you in a helicopter, because the primary characteristic of a chopper is being able to hover in one place, which the game's forced constant scrolling never enables you to do. But anyway...) Frankly, between that description and the screenshots, there isn't much else Indie Zone can tell you about *AirStrike 3D* that you can't see for yourself. Don't you miss the days when two screenshots and one sentence could tell you everything you needed to know about something's basic gameplay?

It's beautifully executed, with a range of resolution settings to suit all manner of PCs. At the top setting it's gorgeous, with extravagantly lit explosions filling the screen – never more impressively than when you offload your mini-nuke weapon. There are stacks of nice weapons to experiment with too, and here's a tip: the best thing to do with them is fire them rapidly at stuff.



My, what big rockets you have.

Indie Zone's main quibble is that it takes a little while to get difficult, but then Indie Zone is a cold-eyed, razor-edged killing machine, so you probably won't find it an issue. For a fraction over a tanner, this is value-for-money mayhem from the top drawer.

**PCZONE VERDICT** 80

Give your brain a rest



"With a genuinely novel gameplay dynamic, it should be a solid addition to the genre."

**PCZONE**

# COVER OR RELIGION.

**ON THIS BATTLEFIELD, EVERYONE FINDS SOMETHING.**

Stay out of harm's way while unleashing a barrage of blindfire.



Confront relentless, fiercely intelligent enemies.



Objects are your only allies. Cover is your only saving grace.



## KILL SWITCH

TAKE COVER. TAKE AIM. TAKE OVER.

European Release : 31st March 2004

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# THE MAN WHO KNOWS

ONCE AGAIN slammed as the root of all evil, a senior politician is claiming that *Grand Theft Auto* has taught a generation of men to beat up prostitutes for fun. Former Democratic presidential hopeful Joseph Lieberman launched a scathing attack on the sickening culture of games, singling out *GTA* for particular vitriol. Lieberman bawled: "You ought to see *Grand Theft Auto*. The player is rewarded for attacking a woman, pushing her to the ground, kicking her repeatedly and then ultimately killing her, shooting her over and over again. I call on the entertainment companies – they've got a right to do that, but they also have a responsibility not to do it if we want to raise the next generation of our sons to treat women with respect."

Characters in a virtual world have been creating their own virtual worlds, it's been revealed. In a terrifying scenario believed to be capable of causing feedback of the brain, sims in *The Sims* have been virtually playing *SimCity*. The situation occurred when *Sims* fan Steve Alvey, who runs *Sims* site *Sim Slice*, developed a classic version of *SimCity* playable by the sims in *The Sims*. Similar to the original *SimCity*, Steve's simplistic simulation, *Slice City*, simulates a city. Simple.

Games turn children into violent obese sloths, according to Swedes. The unfounded opinions were aired on a Swedish television documentary. A child psychiatrist at Sweden's Karolinska Institute University, Frank Lindblad fumed: "It's been proved beyond dispute that people who watch a lot of violence on television develop aggressive behaviour. They run a very high risk of criminal behaviour. There's a lot suggesting that videogames are worse. The border between the virtual reality and the real world becomes diffuse and that's dangerous." An American paediatrician, Michael Rich moaned: "It's concerning because they're rehearsing scripts of behaviour that will possibly play themselves out in real life." Anne Folke, a co-founder of some lobby seemingly intent on demonising games, spat: "They're in poor physical shape, they eat unhealthily, grow fat and suffer insomnia." Welcome to my world.

**"A senior politician is claiming *GTA* has taught a generation of men to beat up prostitutes for fun"**

# BEYOND UNREAL

UT CREATOR UNVEILS ITS NEW SECRET SHOOTER, *PARIAH*



Is this woman a pariah? Wait and see...

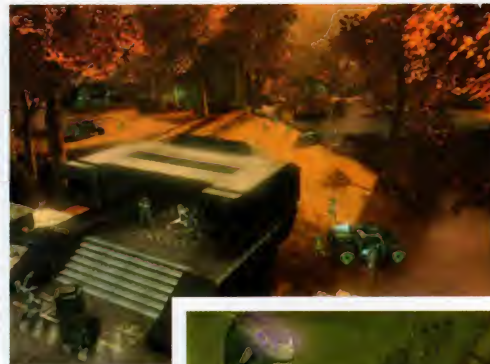


The environments on show are varied and action-packed.

**DIGITAL EXTREMES**, co-creators of *Unreal* and the movers and shakers behind the *Unreal Tournament* series, has thrown some tasty morsels about its top-secret shooter *Pariah* into the FPS hype machine. Due for a full revelation at this May's E3, *Pariah* is a single-player orientated blast that uses the *Unreal* engine blended with some of the finer points provided by *UT2004*.

It's a futuristic blaster with vehicular action, environments that range from alien swamps to military bases in autumnal wasteland, Havok physics and shitloads of action on screen at any time.

With two years of work already under its belt, *Pariah* is slated for a release in this financial year, which means any time before March 2005. We can't wait to get our grubby little hands on it – and you'll know about it as soon as we do.



Big gun. Big alien thing.

- Publisher: Hip Interactive
- Developer: Digital Extremes
- ETA: 2004/Early 2005
- Website: [www.pariahgame.com](http://www.pariahgame.com)

# Pussy Galore

HALLE BERRY STARS IN EA'S LATEST TIE-IN, *CATWOMAN*

**WITH THE** Batman film licence all but ruined by Hollywood schlock director Joel Schumacher, fans of the DC Comics universe are pinning hopes on the new Warner Bros film *Catwoman*, out in the summer. Starring the gorgeous Oscar-winner Halle Berry – Bond girl Jinx in *Die Another Day* – *Catwoman* is also being developed into a third-person action game by UK developer Argonaut in collaboration with EA.

In the game, you can use Catwoman's feline skills to deftly crawl and jump around the environments, run up walls and swing across ledges. You also have use of her 'cat sense' to see useful objects, avoid bullets and see in the dark, giving her an advantage in any catfights.

"As well as her whip that can knock guns out of guards' hands, Catwoman has a Capoeira fighting style," says executive producer Jeff Gamon. "That all goes back to how closely we're working with the film guys, and it's great from a videogame point of view because you're seeing this character who's really low to the ground, legs flying everywhere – it looks really graceful and sexy." We'll have more on *Catwoman* once we've emptied her litter tray.



But will she eat Whiskas and pee in a tray?



Halle is Catwoman. Hear her roar.

- Publisher: EA
- Developer: Argonaut/EA
- ETA: July
- Website: [www.ea.com](http://www.ea.com)



# Punic Flair

EMBRACE GENITAL-REGION PUNS WITH ROMAN STRAT-  
FEST THE PUNIC WARS: A CLASH OF TWO EMPIRES



Elephants: terror of the high seas.



Rome wasn't destroyed in a day.

**IF YOU'VE** been clawing at the beautiful stills of *Rome: Total War* featured on page 28-29, the bad news is you still have a good six months of salivating to go – so how about a stop-gap? *The Punic Wars* may not be quite so wonderful to look at, but it's still a tidy little strategy-cum-resource management affair from Haemimont Games.



Hannibal loved it that his plan had come together.

Detailing the conflict between the two greatest powers of the ancient world, Rome (natch) and Hannibal's plucky North African brigade of Carthaginians, the game sees you juggling food supplies, ordering around armies that contain up to 50 units, preening powerful generals and capturing rival settlements. Who

said Classics was dull? With two single-player campaigns, one that follows Hannibal over the Alps with his pachyderm friends and the other that sees the Romans putting a torch to his home town, the game should have plenty of mileage. But don't just listen to us rambling – you'll be able to try it for yourself next month with our exclusive demo.

■ Publisher: Excalibur ■ Developer: Haemimont games  
■ ETA: May 21 ■ Website: [enlight.com/nemesis/](http://enlight.com/nemesis/)

# RAY OF FIGHT

THE TEAM BEHIND *BREED* SHED LIGHT ON *SOLAR*

**PRETENDERS** to the throne of *Battlefield 1942* are two-a-penny these days, but the northern programmers at Brat Designs are cooking up an interesting variation on what's becoming a well-worn theme with online fragfest *Solar*.

Featuring a war between East and West over dwindling resources 200 years hence, various interplanetary campaigns will see armies trying to complete different objectives in unfavourable conditions. These include acid rain and the muddy trenches of Earth, the underground tunnel complexes of the Moon and the open, vehicle-friendly emptiness of Mars.

With 32 players duking it out in the wastes of the solar system and a sparky bunch of NPC Frankenstein-esque super-soldiers adding extra excitement to the mix, *Solar* clearly has its hopes set on being a worthy competitor to the online sci-fi big-boys of *PlanetSide* and the forthcoming *Star Wars: Battlefront*. With promises of buildings that crumble when a vehicle slams into them, loads of destructible scenery, hovercrafts, choppers and some giant engines of war, it could well be that *Solar* turns up trumps – and even in these early screenshots (where some in-game textures are yet to be applied), we can see a lot of potential.

■ Publisher: TBA  
■ Developer: Brat Designs  
■ ETA: TBA  
■ Website: [www.brat-designs.com/solar.html](http://www.brat-designs.com/solar.html)



Each planet will have its own vibe and style of combat.



Pollution makes the sunset far more beautiful.

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

## GOOD COP

Sefton scooping *Blue Vault*, the latest game from Elixir, like some sort of terrifying journalistic predator.

Will-dre escaping his Brixton pad and setting up camp in Tooting Bec. A place where the grass is far greener and he hasn't been burgled once. Yet.

The most bizarre day of work ever: where back-to-back photo shoots saw Max Payne brushing shoulders with Mafia goons, Jedi knights shooting the breeze with *Pop Idol* judges and a news writer in drag making the tea.

## BAD COP

Everyone catching some sort of Ukrainian-based flu following Will's heroic return from Chernobyl.

Martin's continued absence making everyone sad. And not being able to make any jokes about bear-baiting.

Prezzer's missus going to Japan, meaning that he has to make his own sandwiches for a whole month. How can that be right?

Good Cop: **Jack Bauer** (Kiefer Sutherland)  
Bad Cop: **Nina Myers** (Sarah Clarke) (both from TV's 24) – suggested by Howard Sargent in Ilfracombe, Devon. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a PC ZONE goodie-bag!





RH+ blood cells from co-driver's bitten lip as a Lancia Delta Integrale slams into barricade.



# 04

colin mcrae rally

OUT NOW on PC

**breath taking, heart pounding, pulse racing detail**



Includes LAN &  
Online Multiplay

**8** multiplayer

"Colin McRae is the best  
rally game" - PC Zone

[www.codemasters.co.uk](http://www.codemasters.co.uk)

**Codemasters**

GENIUS AT PLAY™

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# Search For a Game

Got the greatest game idea since *Doom*? Come and put it to the ultimate test – PC ZONE'S Search For A Game...



"Welcome to all you wannabe game designers! We asked for your ideas and we weren't disappointed. From 12-page documents with mocked-up screenshots and world maps to hastily scribbled one-liners on the back of a napkin.

Now the judging begins as our expert panel gives each applicant just 300 words to put across their big idea. First up is Paul Simpson from Stoke-on-Trent, with a game he's been working on for a couple of years and which he describes as..."

**"Alone In The Dark with cats and magic"**

## JACK O'LANTERN

There is a tale of a mean old man named Jack. One cold and stormy night on All Hallows Eve, Jack was on his deathbed and the devil came for him. Jack was cunning and not wanting to go to hell, he tricked the devil to live longer. Years later, when Jack's body could take it no more, he finally died. Unable to enter heaven, he turned towards the fires of hell. The devil, seeking revenge, threw Jack into darkest limbo, with just a burning ember placed in a hollow turnip to light his way.

Cut to Halloween, present day: harnessing the power of the devil's ember, Jack creates a spirit portal to escape his limbo. In 24 hours, Jack will become mortal. Unable to fight against his own powers, the devil makes a girl called Fionn an offer. Just one problem – Fionn is a cat.

Fionn was transformed into a cat by her witch mother, to escape being burned at the stake 300 years ago. Now the devil offers to break the spell if she helps put Jack's spirit back into limbo before he escapes...

Fionn makes her pact with the devil. Using magic, cunning and her cat abilities to trap Jack, she has just one full day to search the village and surrounding areas, collecting items to create spells along the way, all the while fighting off the dark evils that are also escaping from Jack's portal.

Fionn must find Jack and force him back through the portal within 24 hours to become human again, or fail and remain under her mother's spell forever.



Paul also provided plenty of sample screens, maps and artwork.



"I hate cats, so personally I'd run this under the nearest stagecoach. This feels like it should have been released about six years ago – you need to be more commercial. These days, people want to run around chopping heads off and having a good old adventure. Cats are just cats, they're twee. I'd much rather play as the girl character you've drawn and have her transform into a cat-demon, ripping people to shreds – that would be more interesting. I just don't know how commercial this would be. I'd be asking where the sexy lead character is." **Verdict: MISS!**

"Not bad. Best thing is the atmosphere. A mixture of gothic horror and mystical wizardy guff. The main problem is that being a cat is crap. Even if you're a spellcasting cat, you're still a bloody cat. All cats do is piss, climb trees and scratch your eyes out. I like the time limit though. It's like *Impossible Mission* on the C64 where you lost a chunk of mission time when you died. It's a cool device that hasn't been seen in many games over the years. Apart from that I'm not so sure. Some good ideas, severely hampered by the crap main character." **Verdict: MISS!**



"It's bizarre! I really like the 24-hour thing. Lots of other good ideas but too much of it's just story. Yeah, the cat's pretty boring. Maybe if you turned into a monster or a dog – or a monkey. Yeah, if you turned into a witch's monkey then that would be good! You've got some really good ideas, but nothing that other games haven't done a million times better. Yeah, it wouldn't sell because it's just too quirky. Things like this sell if they're *Silent Hill*. This needs more action and a lot more suspense – all the shocks seem too obvious." **Verdict: MISS!**

**"Aww, bad luck there. Ten out of ten for effort, but not enough to capture our judges' imaginations. I thought he had a real chance myself. See you next month with another hopeful!"**

Send your ideas in no more than 300 words (along with a one-line pitch and any artwork) to Search For A Game at the usual address. If any publishers like the sound of anything here, email us at [letters@pczone.co.uk](mailto:letters@pczone.co.uk). (Well, you never know...)





# CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack

TOP 10



King of the hill and lord of the manor is *Champ Man*: the greatest spreadsheet in all the world. Lesser games fail because of endless pages of stats, menus and fiddly options, but Sports Interactive somehow makes something beautiful out of something so ugly.



Four years on and the bleedin' *Sims* are still clogging up the charts like a lump of bacon gristle in an already cholesterol-stuffed artery. Will the franchise continue to suck the life out of witty, sales-based charts analysis? Tune in next month!

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1 RE	<b>CHAMP MAN: SEASON 03/04</b>	EIDOS	90%
2 NEW	<b>X2: THE THREAT</b>	DEEP SILVER	92%
3 ▼	<b>THE SIMS</b>	EA	86%
4 ▼	<b>CALL OF DUTY</b>	ACTIVISION	94%
5 ▼	<b>THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC</b>	EA	55%
6 NEW	<b>BLACK HAWK DOWN - TEAM SABRE</b>	NOVALOGIC	63%
7 ▼	<b>THE SIMS: UNLEASHED</b>	EA	78%
8 ▼	<b>THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR</b>	EA	59%
9 ▼	<b>THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE</b>	EA	67%
10 RE	<b>DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN</b>	NOVALOGIC	52%



A huge and well deserved hit for Deep Silver (once known as Koch Media). True gamers are lapping up its sublime and engrossing gameplay, spurning the mainstream *Sims*-mad populace. We shall triumph! Today *X2: The Threat*, tomorrow the world!



The *Delta Force* franchise has always been popular in the face of critical opinion and *Team Sabre* seems to be no exception. The fact that you need the full version of *Black Hawk Down* to run it perhaps explains its reappearance at number ten.

## YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at [www.pczone.co.uk](http://www.pczone.co.uk)

*Team Sabre* is proof that putting 'sequel to the best-selling shooter' on the box sells shit games - if ever it were needed.  
**Spudy2000**

I'm giving a rallying call to all PC gamers to wipe the shelves of all computer game stores by buying all the new decent releases so we can at long last get rid of the beast that is *The Sims*.  
**AlanShep2001**

What in the name of George Bush Jnr are two *Delta Force* games doing in the top ten? Are the CIA and MI5 so fed up with looking for dodgy WMDs that all their agents have gone out and bought dodgy games instead?  
**bagsabbis**

TOP 10

1.	<b>X2: THE THREAT</b>	DEEP SILVER
2.	<b>CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04</b>	EIDOS
3.	<b>HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED</b>	MICROSOFT
4.	<b>NEVERWINTER NIGHTS + UNDRENTIDE PACK</b>	ATARI
5.	<b>VIETCONG: PURPLE HAZE</b>	GATHERING
6.	<b>TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004</b>	EA
7.	<b>THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC</b>	EA
8.	<b>CALL OF DUTY</b>	ACTIVISION
9.	<b>URU: AGES BEYOND MYST</b>	UBISOFT
10.	<b>HIDDEN &amp; DANGEROUS 2</b>	GATHERING

COMPETITION

## Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

**QUESTION: Which German development house is responsible for the sublime *X2: The Threat*?**

Send your answers on a postcard to:

PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 141, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: April 28, 2004

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.



# INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE COMING MONTHS. THESE ARE ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES, CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

## APRIL

BEYOND DIVINITY	DIGITAL JESTERS
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04	CODEMASTERS
POOL PARADISE	IGNITION
DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS	DIGITAL JESTERS
HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS
KNIGHTSHIFT	DEEP SILVER
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE: INFERNAL CRUSADE	TDK MEDIACTIVE
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
PERIMETER	CODEMASTERS
SACRED	ASCARON
SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE	DEEP SILVER
TOGA RACE DRIVER 2: ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR	CODEMASTERS

## MAY

CSI 2	UBISOFT
HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	EA
MANHUNT	ROCKSTAR
TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA	ACTIVISION

## JUNE

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
MASHED	EMPIRE
SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS
SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII	CODEMASTERS

## Q2

CITY OF HEROES	NCISOFT
EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER: FRANCHISE EDITION	SEGA
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	ATARI
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	EIDOS
UEFA EURO 2004	EA
WARLORDS BATTLECRY III	ENLIGHT

## Q3

AMERICA'S 10 MOST WANTED	SYSTEM 3
CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
JUICED	ACCLAIM
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR	THQ
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

## Q4

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
BLOODRAYNE 2	VU GAMES
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
FAHRENHEIT	VU GAMES
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA EUROPE
THE MATRIX ONLINE	TBA
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES

## REST OF 2004

AXIS & ALLIES	ATARI
BLACK9	VU GAMES
BLOWOUT	VU GAMES
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DUNGEON SIEGE 2	MICROSOFT
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
IRON STORM	DEEP SILVER
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
SID MEIER'S PIRATES	ATARI
SÖLDNER - SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY	EA
WARHAMMER ONLINE	SEGA

# MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

## SAM & MAX 2

**THE MOST** painful blow of the issue comes direct from the Lucas camp: Sam & Max are dead & buried. An "evaluation of current market place realities" carried out by evil corporate rabbit-haters deemed it an inappropriate time to launch a graphic adventure. Fools! Ignorant capitalist fools!

- Publisher: Activision
- Developer: Lucasarts
- ETA: KIA



## PAINKILLER



**SNARLING** demons and the souls of a multitude of programmers are beaver away to fine-tune Painkiller's marvellous variety of physics-led, Serious Sam-style mayhem. If all goes well, we should be reviewing it next issue and it should hit the shelves around April.

- Publisher: Dreamcatcher
- Developer: People Can Fly
- ETA: April
- Website: [www.painkillergame.com](http://www.painkillergame.com)

## SÖLDNER: SECRET WARS

**A GARGANTUAN** battle between rival online shooters is limbering up in the sidelines - *BF: Vietnam* and *Joint Ops* are flexing their frag muscles, but industry gossip has it that plucky outsider *Söldner: Secret Wars* won't be hitting its stride until July. Its recurring place in this column suggests this is quite likely.

- Publisher: Big Ben
- Developer: Wings Simulations
- ETA: Possibly July
- Website: [www.bigbeninteractive.co.uk](http://www.bigbeninteractive.co.uk)



# US TOP 10

1. CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
2. EVERQUEST: GATES OF DISCORD	UBISOFT
3. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
4. THE SIMS: DELUXE	EA
5. ZOO TYCOON: COMPLETE COLLECTION	MICROSOFT
6. THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	EA
7. HOYLE CASINO 2004	VU GAMES
8. THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
9. DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN - TEAM SABRE	NOVALOGIC
10. THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA





# SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII



**Codemasters ramps up the explosive action in this WWII RTS**

**IF YOU'RE** still wondering why we're slaving over *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII*, check out the stonking movies on our cover discs. Developed by Ukrainian developer Best Way, this single-player and multiplayer title takes the *Commando* blueprint and blows it apart, with the ability to directly control single units such as tanks and soldiers, using FPS-style controls to pull off headshots and stealth kills.

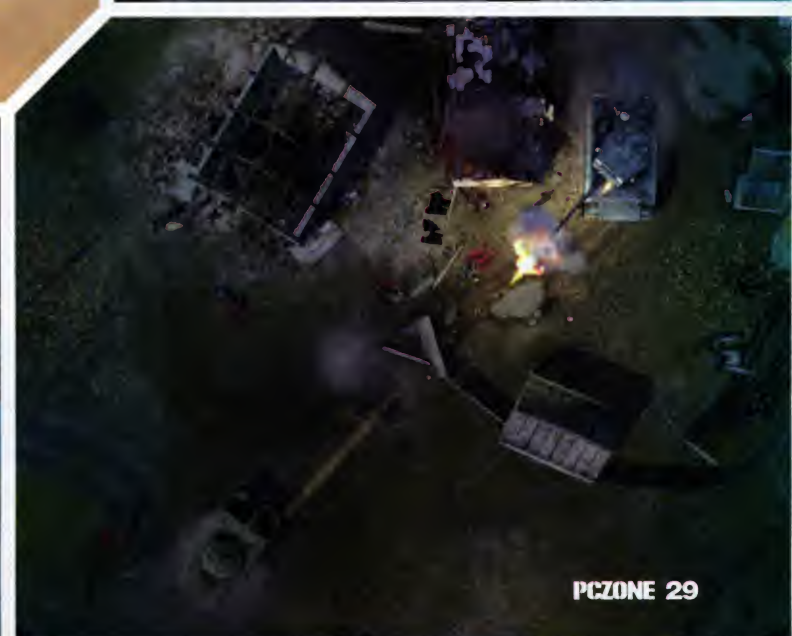
As either Allied, Russian or German forces, you can plan and complete missions any way you want, storming in with mortars-a-blazing, or sneakily taking out unsuspecting enemies under cover of darkness, using the real-time lighting feature to shoot out street lamps.

*Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* has a staggering amount of period detail for authentic vehicles, buildings, weapons and uniforms, but it's the physics and particle effects that makes the game such a visceral assault on the senses. Witness grenades blasting out windows and sending shards of glass into the street, and tanks firing shells that obliterate buildings and throw bloodied bodies screaming into the air – nope, this is no run-of-the-mill RTS. Check out our exclusive hands-on war report next issue.

- **Publisher:** Codemasters
- **Developer:** Best Way
- **ETA:** June
- **Website:** [www.codemasters.com/soldiers](http://www.codemasters.com/soldiers)









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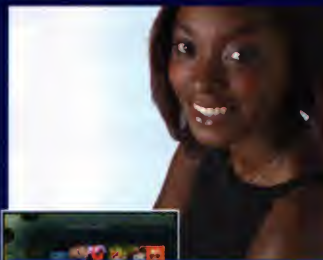
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What have the Romans ever given us?

# ROME: TOTAL WAR

Martin Korda takes a trip to The Creative Assembly for a world exclusive-look at what's shaping up to be the most epic RTS in history

LAST  
PREVIEWED  
PCZONE  
ISSUE  
137

## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** The Creative Assembly  
**PUBLISHER** Activision  
**WEBSITE** [www.totalwar.com](http://www.totalwar.com)  
**ETA** Autumn 2004

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the most stunning-looking RTS ever
- Battles of over 40,000 -3D rendered troops
- Breathtakingly cinematic
- Deep, complex, yet easy to pick up
- Two games in one
- Astounding AI

**I HAVE** a dream. A dream where I can look down from a city's ramparts and spy a sea of baying warriors below, my ears pounding like war drums from their courage-sapping cries as I lead a last-stand defence of my empire. A dream where I can command thousands of warriors on picturesque battlefields against titanic enemy forces just by switching on my PC, and believe I'm actually there. Come autumn, that dream could be a reality with *Rome: Total War*.

In a recent world exclusive viewing, we spent several hours touring the latest

build of this stunning 3D RTS, guided by The Creative Assembly's studio marketing manager Ian Roxburgh, development director Mike Simpson and owner, founder and managing director of CA, Tim Ansell. What we found was quite simply the most ambitious and all-conquering RTS the world has ever seen. Prepare to be astounded.

## TOUR OF DUTY

I'm sitting in a spacious conference room, and it's far too early. Mike and Tim flit busily outside while Ian sets

up the demonstration. With every second precious at such a critical stage of the game's development, Ian's not wasting any time and kicks things off before the other two are even settled in their chairs by telling me a little about *Rome's* basics. "Just like its predecessors *Shogun* and *Medieval*, *Rome* is split into two parts: a turn-based strategic map on which you conduct troop movements,

## CV



## THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

Having spent several years creating and converting sports games for EA, The Creative Assembly hit the big time with its revolutionary *Total War* series. Here are the highlights...

- 2000** *Shogun: Total War* takes the world by storm with its stunning 3D landscapes and immense battles which feature literally thousands of troops.
- 2001** *The Mongol Invasion* expansion pack builds on *Shogun's* success.
- 2002** *Medieval: Total War* storms to the top of the PC charts. Its massively expanded playing map offers more troops, battles, diplomacy and espionage than both of its predecessors combined.
- 2003** Prime time BBC2 programme *Time Commanders* – in which often gormless contestants attempt to recreate historical battles using the latest *Rome: Total War* code – airs to an average audience of 2,000,000 viewers.





look, I think I see uncle Monty! Yoo hoo!"



There's no smoke without fire you know.





trading, governing, diplomacy and espionage; and a real-time 3D strategy section in which the battles take place," he begins, surprisingly chirpy for such an early hour.

First off, Ian introduces me to the three Roman factions available for the campaign. "To start with, you can play as either Scipii, Julii or Brutii. Each has a slightly different playing style. Julii will tend to move north into the Gaul

territories and mainland Europe. Brutii are more likely to come into conflict with the Greeks and Macedonians, while Scipii will tend to move down towards Carthage, Africa and Egypt."

But with the game featuring some 21 factions in total, why only the choice of three? "Once you've completed the game with one of these, you'll unlock all the other factions," reassures Ian, perfectly reading my worried expression.

## BREAKING YOU IN GENTLY

### ROME WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY

Scared off by the idea of having to conquer the whole of Europe? Terrified at the prospect of having to manage a sprawling empire? Mewling child who's never played a game before? Fear not, help is at hand in the form of a Prologue campaign. Set just before the main game kicks off, you're tasked with the much simpler goal of conquering Rome. "Effectively, it's a cut-down version of the campaign, which gives tutelage to new players so they can play the freeform campaign with full battles, but with a lot of help along the way," explains marketing manager Ian Roxburgh.

During the main campaign, an advisor will guide you in every matter – but if you simply want to get a feel for the battles, then you'll be able to try out your tactical prowess on six diverse historical battles. So even the greenest of newcomers need not be frightened.



Easy does it now.

"There'll be about ten playable factions in all including the The Greek Cities, Spanish, Seleucids, Carthaginians, Egyptians, Germans, Britons and Gauls, all of which will have different tech trees that are much more varied than those in *Medieval*." Panic over.

Your choice of faction will also influence your dealings with the Senate. Similar to the Pope in *Medieval*, this collection of massively influential lard-arses will provide you with missions, such as overrunning a Gaul settlement or assassinating an enemy general. Complete these and your influence and leverage with the white toga-wearing bores will soar, putting you in an excellent position later on in the game when you attempt to take sole control of the Senate and install yourself as emperor of Rome.

Senate missions should also prove useful to newcomers intimidated by *Rome*'s radically freeform nature. As Tim Ansell explains: "They give you a bit

of direction, so if you want to just follow these preset missions, you can." It's this

kind of thinking that's testament to The Creative Assembly's commitment to making *Rome* accessible to every type of gamer, as it creates a title promising near-infinite complexity, yet instant playability. Further evidence of this comes when Ian tells me that *Rome* is being geared towards a minimum spec of a PIII 800 – a staggeringly low system requirement for a game where every single unit is rendered in glorious 3D and boasts a complex array of AI scripts under its gleaming battle armour.

### TAKE YOUR TURN

So onto the turn-based campaign map. Whereas its predecessor's map had a number of featureless 2D provinces with just one battlefield, *Rome* has received a complete overhaul that'll bring a totally new strategic dimension to the series.

For starters, the map has been utterly transformed, with beautifully rendered



Larger battles will feature tens on thousands of troops.



3D landscapes reflecting their real-life regions and buildings sprouting up from the ground as you build them. Majestic, snow-capped mountains roll across southern Europe, morphing into lush, dense forests as we move up into central Europe and Germania. To the east, arid sand dunes stretch over vast intimidating swathes of land, while

now move armies within each province, placing them on hills or hiding them in forests to set up ambushes for any opportunist nation that fancies having a go. This troop positioning will also determine both your starting deployment and the layout of the battlefield when the game switches to 3D RTS mode. All of the campaign

## **"They'll be about ten playable factions, all with different tech trees that are far more varied than those in *Medieval*"**

IAN ROXBURGH MARKETING MANAGER, THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

Scandinavia looks flatter than an ironed pancake. Volcanoes smoke menacingly, while tides lap the shores gently, belying the sea's slumbering power.

### **WATCH IT BLOW**

As Ian moves the game forward a few turns, the Volcano starts to smoke more violently, then slowly, gradually, begins to erupt, molten rocks propelled into the air with unearthly force, crashing down and devastating nearby cities. As our tour of Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor comes to an end, Ian explains that floods and famine will also blight you, depending where you are on the map. As if world domination wasn't hard enough already.

Probably the campaign map's most radical overhaul involves regional troop movement. Unlike in *Medieval*, you can

map's geography will also be present on the actual battlefield.

Thanks to this new deployment feature, there's now a near infinite amount of battlefields for you to fight on – avoiding the repetition suffered by *Shogun* and *Medieval* – meaning your battle tactics will need to be even more diverse. "If you're facing the Greek phalanxes which need flat terrain to be effective, you can go out of your way to make the battle difficult for them by keeping your troops on the high ground," explains Tim, now settled in his chair.

### **CALM BEFORE THE STORM**

With time moving on and with my constant bleating pleas to watch an actual battle finally paying dividends, Ian quickly explains about the campaign's two distinct sections as he loads up

## **THE ART OF DIPLOMACY**

### **IF YOU CAN'T CONQUER IT, BARGAIN FOR IT**

While *Medieval* was a cracking game, it wasn't without its faults – a fact that CA is eminently aware of. Diplomacy was one such weakness, often proving too inflexible, clumsy and confusing – especially for newcomers. However, as Ian Roxburgh points out, these problems will soon be a thing of the past. "We've created loads of different options for making diplomatic offers and demands. You can even promise not to attack someone if they give you a certain amount of money. Every asset in the game will be tradeable too and you'll even have the option to set up protectorate states that pay you to look after them."

However, renege on your deals and your reputation will plummet into the gutter faster than a posh daddy's girl caught in the act in a hotel room. Of course, you can always just take everyone's money and wade in with your armies anyway if you like, because as CA's founder and MD Tim Ansell says: "Who needs to be trustworthy when you've got big armies?" Damn straight.



If military might fails, try tact... Or bribery.





a desert encounter. "When you control a certain amount of the map, the second half of the game will kick in and there'll be a civil war where the other two Roman factions turn against you and the Senate will try to bring you down a peg or two. So not only will you be trying to maintain your empire, you'll also be fighting against the other two Roman factions." It's clearly a brave and innovative idea, one that will ensure you're challenged from the very first skirmish, right up to the game's final titanic confrontation.

But at last, it's time for a fight. This is what I've been waiting for, shuffling in

my seat impatiently as Tim, Ian and Mike watch on in amusement. Let battle commence.

### DEATH IN THE DESERT

It's morning, but the sun is already high, peaking out over the nearby pyramids and bathing the barren landscape in a deep yellow hue. To our right, three legions of regal cavalry await orders in perfect formation, banners flying high, riders at the ready. To our left, praetorians are lined behind pilum-toting javelineers, and at our rear archers examine their bows.

We can see the Egyptians in the distance, trails of dust betraying their approach, massed ranks clearly outnumbering our own. Our commander, turning to his men,



Three new contestants line up for *Love On A Saturday Night*.



Fiddle while Rome: Total War burns.

## LAW AND ORDER

### WATCH OUT FOR REVOLTING PEASANTS, THEY STINK OF PISS



Gonna be a lynchin'.

There's nothing like a good riot is there? Charging mounted police and throwing bricks through the windows of McDonald's. Ah, happy days. Wouldn't it be nice then, if the disgruntled populace of one of your cities, sickened by high taxation, over population and squalor, could kick things off and force you to give them a kicking? You know what? In *Rome*, you can do just that.

"The rioting peasants will start in the city centre, while you'll start at the city outskirts," explains development director Mike Simpson, an evil grin cracking across his lips. "In order to quell the rebels, you'll have to capture the plaza." But there's a catch. "The most painful type of rebellion is when you have a city with an amphitheatre and you have a gladiator revolt. They're among the toughest units in the game." Sounds nasty. More tea Mr Gladiator, sir?

begins shouting words of encouragement, a rousing speech that perfectly portrays the situation we find ourselves in. A war cry pierces the silence.

With that, we send our cavalry wheeling away, double-clicking on their lead formation so we're riding with them, sitting on their shoulders – a stunningly cinematic viewpoint – as the music changes to a pounding Egyptian war song. With one mouse-click we swing back to the main force, giving the order for them to advance on the enemy.

We can see their covered faces now, hateful eyes peering out as they bay like animals and surge forward. Our archers let loose a volley, arrows stopping many of them in their tracks like an invisible force field. Some get up groggily and rejoin the charge, only to be met by a hail of pilums thrown by our spearmen. More of them drop.

With the Egyptian ranks disorganised and stunned by our projectile onslaught, our men draw their short

swords and prepare for the final push. Using *Rome*'s multiple formation select feature, we highlight our entire force and direct it towards the heart of the enemy, and watch as our men intelligently fan out to avoid the kind of bottlenecking which so often blighted *Medieval*.

### BLOOD AND THUNDER

The impact of the two armies is sickening. Zooming right into the fray, troops battle one-on-one, thrusting, parrying, countering, pushing and stabbing at one another, every man possessing individual stats and AI, as well as 12 motion-captured attack and defence animations as they scrap.

But victory is not yet certain, and, reluctant to leave our main force, we set our still-circling cavalry to auto-control – again a new feature – a trusted AI lieutenant told to take the horses round the back and flank the Egyptians.

The enemy are falling like wheat



The campaign map has received a complete revamp.



at harvest time, but their sheer weight of numbers is beginning to encircle our smaller yet superior force, and the battle suddenly looks like it could be lost. Right on cue, the storm of hooves on sand rises in the desert and we pull back the camera in time to see our three AI-led cavalry legions crack into the Egyptian rear, causing a shockwave of such ferocity that their ranks are cut in two.

The battle is clearly won, but we've seen enough and Ian presses the quit key and uses the new mid-battle auto-resolve function to calculate the closing stages of the battle. Victory is ours.

#### RALLY THE TROOPS

"You could be looking at battles of up to 48,000 troops in an eight-player multiplayer game and around 4,000 on a minimum spec machine," explains Tim, breaking the silence as I sit dumbfounded.

Time now for a siege battle, and while Ian sets it up, Mike takes me through some of the game's new units, which include flesh-ripping war dogs, elephants that send enemy troops flying through the air with just one flick of their tusks, man-chopping chariots and of course pilum throwers. Best of all, though, are the incendiary pigs – tar-covered bacon rashers on legs which are set on fire and let loose on nearby elephants, their agonised screams terrifying the big-eared beasts and causing them to flee in fear. Inspired.

Ian's ready, and our attention turns again to the enormous wall-mounted

widescreen monitor, which I'm secretly planning to conceal in my pants when I leave. On screen are 5,000 Roman

soldiers attacking a Carthaginian fortress, their onagers (catapults) hurling rocks at the buckling stone battlements, while horrifyingly life-like ballistas impale dozens of the defending archers lining the walls.

As the Carthaginians start to crumble, the Romans bring forward their battering rams, siege towers and ladders, climbing up to engage the defenders across the entire breadth of the fortress. It's not long before the gates burst open and the attackers flood in, the two armies embroiled in vicious street combat. It's a truly awesome sight

to behold, akin to *Return Of The King's* 'Battle of Minas Tirith', only with Romans doing the fighting instead of orcs.

As far as we can make out, *Rome* is a masterpiece in the making – an RTS unparalleled by any immediate competitor. And with the game all but finished and currently being crammed with as many extra features as The Creative Assembly can put in before it ships, it's likely to be even better come autumn. What say you we skip spring and summer this year, hmmm? After all, who needs the sun when you've got *Rome: Total War*? [E]



Multiple unit selection is now just a click away.

#### Why Don't You?...

**NO MATTER HOW GOOD YOU ARE, YOU CAN ALWAYS LEARN FROM OTHERS**

A couple of issues ago, in our world exclusive *Black & White 2* preview, we mentioned that Lionhead would benefit from making its battles a little more like *Rome's*. Well, today we're going to return the compliment and suggest that *Rome* could benefit from borrowing from *B&W2's* city-building aspects.

*Rome* is quite clearly the closest any pure RTS is likely to get to replicating the battle of Minas Tirith from *Return Of The King*, despite EA's considerably less epic *Battle For Middle-earth*. So why not allow us the option to build multiple levels to our strongholds, just like in the White City, and an option Lionhead is promising to provide with *Black & White 2*?

Sure, it may not be historically accurate, but who cares? Imagine being able to drop back to your city's next level of defences, reorganising your troops while the enemy batters at your gates. Worth considering maybe? We think so.



We want Minas Tirith!



The best anti-elephant weapon? Burning pigs.

**"You could be looking at battles of up to 48,000 troops in an eight-player multiplayer game"**

TIM ANSELL FOUNDER, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY







Elixir's new strategy game *Blue Vault* revealed!

Men in Blue...

# BLUE VAULT

**Jamie Sefton visits Elixir Studios and uncovers the truth behind the sci-fi strategy sequel to *Republic: The Revolution*. Check out the world's first screenshots and info!**

**A GORGEOUS** summer day in the city. The afternoon sun reflects brightly off the hazy streams of traffic as you relax on a park bench and open your executively priced vacuum-packed carton of egg mayonnaise sandwiches. Without warning, a deep, resonant rumbling begins to sound, as people begin to look concerned and turn their heads skywards.

A fiery streak suddenly tears across the sky and a blinding white light forces everyone to cover their eyes in terror. The light dissipates, slowly revealing half a dozen ten-metre-tall alien rock creatures, their red eyes glowering at the screaming crowds, as everything around you is engulfed in flames...

This is where the mysterious Blue Vault organisation steps in, to assess the alien threat, contain it and make sure that the general population is kept unaware of the fact that we're not alone in the universe. *Blue Vault* (working title) is the brand new game from Demis Hassabis' Elixir Studios, previously responsible for epic RTS *Republic: The Revolution*, and currently also hard at work constructing an evil SPECTRE-style base of operations for *Evil Genius* (see page 52).

PC ZONE is being given a world exclusive presentation of Elixir's latest strategy epic by CEO Mark Hewitt and the

game's producer, James Sutherland, and as well as being blown away by the mightily impressive visuals before us, we're also rather taken by the company's ample supply of coffee and shortbread biscuit selection...

*Blue Vault's* 18-strong development

## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Elixir Studios

**PUBLISHER** TBC

**WEBSITE** [www.elixir-studios.com](http://www.elixir-studios.com)

**ETA** Q4 2005

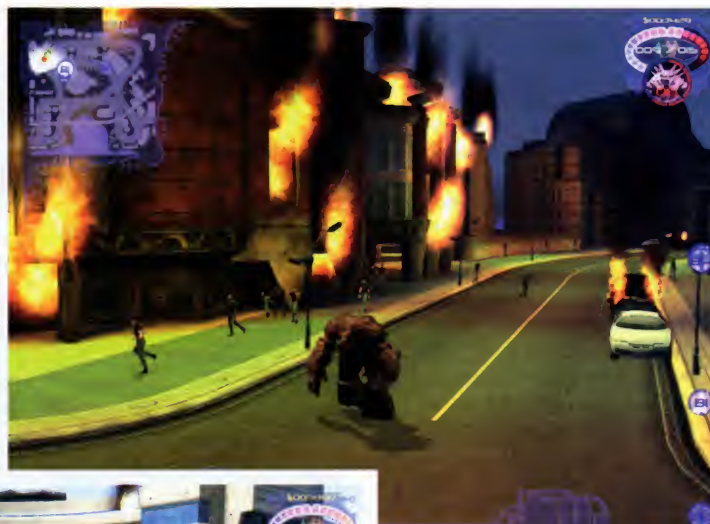
## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New RTS from the makers of *Republic: The Revolution*
- Futuristic alien-containment theme
- Innovative culture shock method of crowd control
- Built on the gorgeous Totality engine



**"Many games have this dark, grimy, futuristic setting, but we've gone for this pristine style of world"**

**JAMES SUTHERLAND**  
PRODUCER, ELIXIR STUDIOS



The sector mini-map (top left) shows aliens, units and panicky people.



Building destruction is scripted, so pathfinding for AI won't be disrupted.



The black orbs near the Conspirators are advanced remote PA devices.

team, made up of recruits fresh from *Republic: The Revolution*, has only been working on the title since September, but the build we were shown was already in fine fettle (see *Totality Recall*, below). The game takes place in the near future, approximately 20 years from now, when a cataclysmic meteorite hit has wiped out the USA's major east coast cities. Capital city Washington DC was damaged substantially, so a capsule was quickly relocated to the west coast of America, where a gleaming, new city – New Washington – has been built.

"Many games have this dark, grimy, futuristic setting, but we've gone for this pristine style of world," says Sutherland. "When a beautiful building is on fire, it shocks you more. Subconsciously, it urges the player on and it definitely works as an incentive." The other thing it allows is to have some smart sci-fi architecture that's being designed by a concept artist who's actually worked at Alton Towers on the park's amusements and landscapes.

However, although the architecture works fantastically well with the detailed lighting engine, all the buildings have been

designed from the ground up from a gameplay perspective, to give you full use of the 3D environments for the planning and executing of missions.

### SUPER TROOPERS

If we were pitching *Blue Vault* to a cigar-chomping Hollywood movie mogul, we'd probably describe it simplistically as 'X-COM meets *Men In Black* in 3D', with you controlling a government agency whose sole aim is to constantly counter an alien threat and prevent the population from discovering the conspiracy. This dual

tension is the crux of the gameplay, so even if you manage to deal successfully with an interplanetary nuisance, if you scare the bejesus out of too many people – what Elixir is calling 'culture shock' – you'll fail the mission (see *Shock Treatment*, page 40).

*Blue Vault*'s strategy element involves the usual research, resource-gathering, unit recruitment and skill advancement, but the team is going into a lot of detail that'll be "almost to an RPG level" according to Sutherland. There'll be 40 unique unit characters, each with their own features, toolset, stats and hopefully, voice. "X-COM missions were quite similar with very little characterisation. We want to push the character element further, so you really care about your teams. Imagine each *Blue Vault* operative shouting orders or screaming in agony with a different voice."

In any of the 16 sectors of New Washington, you have control of a

## TOTALITY RECALL

### ELIXIR'S GRAPHICS ENGINE USED TO RENDER *REPUBLIC* IS BEING PUT TO GOOD USE

Back in issue 132, when our Paul Presley gave *Republic: The Revolution* 88 per cent, he noted that the "amazing 3D engine is criminally underused." Well, those five years of development not only produced *Republic*, but the *Totality* engine, which is now being used to create all of Elixir's new games – *Evil Genius*, *Blue Vault* and a third, secret title yet to be announced.

"Our investment in *Republic*'s *Totality* engine is already paying off," said CEO Mark Hewitt. "Each of our games take 30-40 per cent of the core engine, but then the individual teams have different AI people, graphic artists and so on. This allows us now to produce games very quickly and with impressive quality, but the look and feel for each is very different." This is certainly the case – all the *Blue Vault* work-in-progress screenshots you see on these pages have been taken from playable code produced in just four months.



*Blue Vault* is building using *Republic*'s *Totality* engine.



maximum of four units, using any combination of the four unit types. Blue Ops are your standard tactical soldier, whereas Indigo Ops are your elite troopers that utilise alien technology. Obviously, the latter are more adept at dealing with space tourists, but you have to be careful not to freak out bystanders, who will notice their strange uniforms and hybrid weaponry.

Engineers, on the other hand, repair stuff, allow you to recover valuable alien artefacts, hijack cars to build barricades and also reinforce any cover-up with visible evidence, such as releasing weather balloons to explain that bizarre 'meteorological event' annoyingly witnessed by dozens of people.

Finally, there are your Conspirators – the 'Men in Blue' who're crucial for crowd control and ensuring that you protect the populace from mass panic caused by first contact. This is where Elixir's 'stimuli

## SHOCK TREATMENT

### BLUE VAULT'S 'CULTURE SHOCK' IS AN RTS INNOVATION

Ah, bless the general public. Instead of meeting and greeting a monster from another world with a firm handshake, they're much more likely to start screaming, crying uncontrollably and pissing into their trousers – known as 'culture shock' in *Blue Vault*. That's why you need the Conspirators, your front line in the battle to keep the general populace in the dark.

Your two agents have powers of persuasion to allay people's fears, ask them politely to leave the area, find a medic for attention, follow you to a safe haven or a number of other instructions visualised by a coloured spiral that affects an area immediately around them. If you're successful, the indicator in the top right-hand corner of the screen



Use your Conspirators' powers to calm down the public.

will show a decrease in the number of folks with culture shock and you can continue the mission. However, if you're too late, you'll have a mass panic on your hands and the national TV news beckons.

Also, the more alien activity you haven't dealt with, the more trouble you'll

have with groups of alien worshippers. Some of these pan-species cultists even have the same powers as your Conspirators, but will use them for malicious purposes including using innocent people as human shields, and directing them towards fires!



Don't panic!



Up to 1,000 people can be rendered on screen, with up to 3,000 polygons each.

40 PCZONE

system', also used to a certain extent in *Republic*, comes into play, where individual AI-controlled characters react to things they see and hear.

So, if a member of the public has a glimpse of alien technology, for example, or is confronted by a Blue Vault soldier pointing a gun at them, they'll become fearful, but this will soon recede if you manage to tell them to move out of the danger zone. However, if the person is left in the vicinity of an alien visitor, they will go into culture shock, meaning they're so scared and irrational that they become a danger to themselves. In this case, you quickly have to use your Conspirators' special persuasive powers to calm people down, or you'll quickly fail your objectives.

### MISSION CONTROL

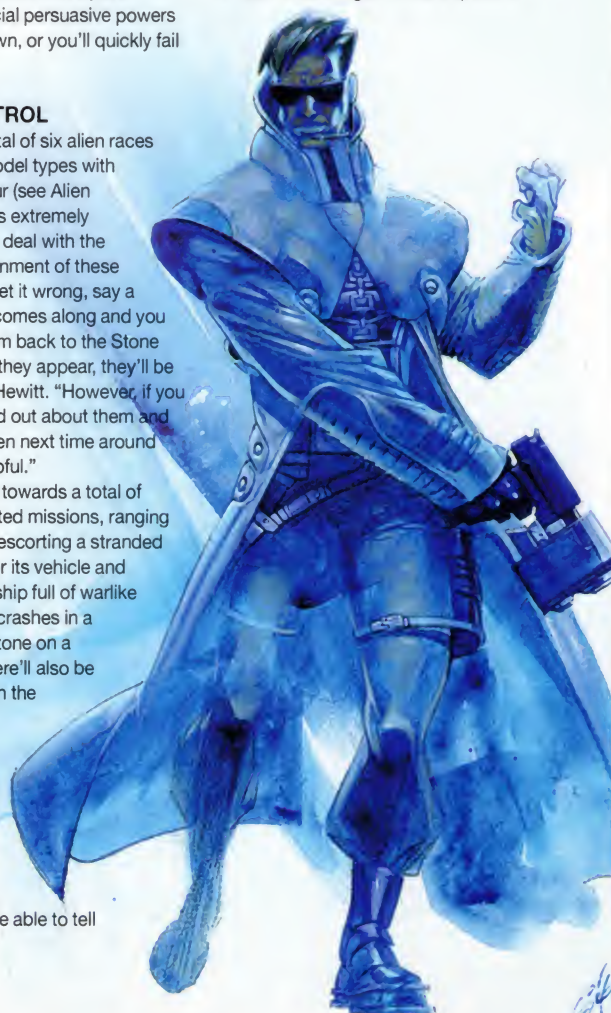
*Blue Vault* has a total of six alien races and 15 different model types with emergent behaviour (see Alien Nation, right), so it's extremely important how you deal with the combat and containment of these creatures. "If you get it wrong, say a friendly alien race comes along and you decide to blow them back to the Stone Age, the next time they appear, they'll be aggressive," says Hewitt. "However, if you take the time to find out about them and work with them, then next time around they'll be more helpful."

Elixir is working towards a total of more than 30 scripted missions, ranging from rescuing and escorting a stranded alien so it can repair its vehicle and launch, to a spaceship full of warlike alien convicts that crashes in a downtown leisure zone on a Saturday night. There'll also be random spanners in the works, such as an epidemic of intergalactic spores that bury themselves in human skin. If the emergent mission system works well, players shouldn't be able to tell

which missions are scripted and which are simply random.

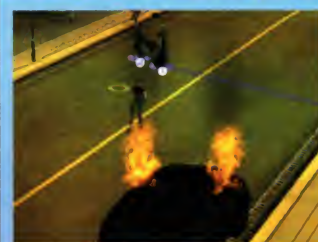
### SHAKE YOUR TACTICS

The game's camera is tethered to your units, quite low down, which limits what the player can see. This creates a real fog of war, making information gathering really crucial. "If you have individual characters, mortality is an important factor. You can't just run around a corner and rush into an unknown situation because you can die," adds Sutherland. So you could, for example, put a sniper on the roof of a building, giving you a better tactical view, or later on in the game with improved





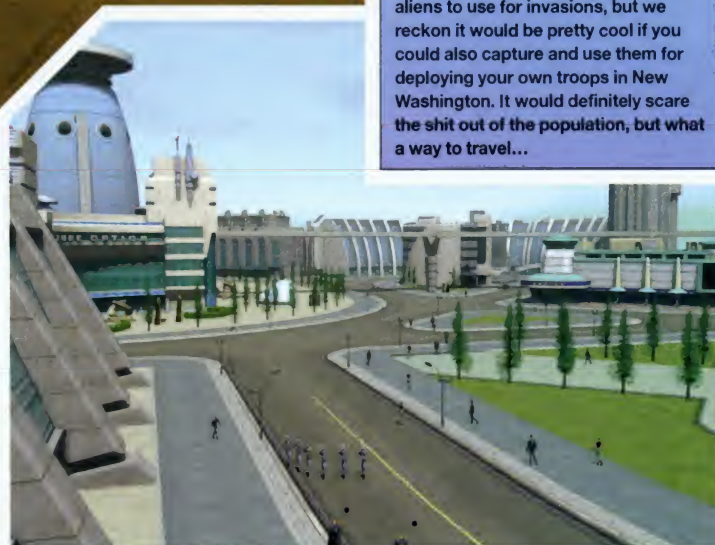
## Why Don't You?...



Delivery vehicles will be included.

### BRING OUT THE SPACESHIPS!

With *Blue Vault* only in development since last September, there's still plenty of time to add features to enhance the game. Apparently, Elixir will be creating spaceships for the aliens to use for invasions, but we reckon it would be pretty cool if you could also capture and use them for deploying your own troops in New Washington. It would definitely scare the shit out of the population, but what a way to travel...



The context cursor enables you to easily deal with troop cover of terrain.

trooper skill stats, ask for a satellite sweep of the area.

Elixir wants to avoid RTS 'Tank Rush Syndrome' where players just grab units in one lump and move them around the map completing tasks. As a result, tactical control of your units is straightforward, with just a few keyboard taps sending your six troops in different directions, splitting them into formations and squads and setting focus – the blue lines you can see spreading out from each player character.

"In *StarCraft*, everything has 360-degree arc of fire, so it doesn't matter where enemies are coming from," says Hewitt. "In *Blue Vault*, it's a tactical decision where your troops are going to look, depending on what weapons they have." So you'll want your sniper guy focusing on specific areas or tracking individuals, but your flame-thrower fella covering a wider area of destruction.

Elixir is planning to include specific formations such as a defensive position with a rocket launcher covering your flank, but you'll also be able to research formations, depending on your squad leader's statistics for tactical awareness. This presents gamers with a choice – do you spread your squad out to gather information and dilute firepower, or concentrate your squads and not know where the threat is?

As well as the position for units, you can also set their attitude, which governs how they respond to situations. You can set individuals or whole squads to fire at will, return fire if provoked, get the hell out of there or, most importantly, don't fire but report back if the situation changes – useful when you're controlling up to four units in one sector at once.

### THE CONSPIRACY

At this very early 'proof of concept' stage, *Blue Vault* is already showing potential to become a real-time strategy game as compelling as *Republic: The Revolution*, with a more marketable and accessible theme. There's so much Elixir has left to complete before the late 2005 release, such as the combat system and the final animations, but the Totality engine is already churning out some gorgeous futuristic cityscapes.

After we'd drunk enough coffee to keep us awake for a week and scoffed Elixir's entire biscuit budget, just one question remained – what does 'Blue Vault' actually mean? Mark Hewitt turned to James Sutherland and looked at him conspiratorially. For a split-second I'm sure I saw a flash of grey deep in their eyes, as if each was wearing a thin human mask. "Don't worry," they said together, smiling, "you'll find out soon enough."

Yet to be implemented, combat will involve RPG stats like strength and armour.

**"Blow a friendly alien race back to the Stone Age, and the next time they appear they'll be aggressive"**

MARK HEWITT CEO, ELIXIR STUDIOS

## ALIEN NATION



"Must mate with human species..."

### A WHOLE WORLD OF ALIEN SPECIES WAITING TO MEET YOU...

Elixir plans to populate the game with six alien species, comprising of a total of 15 unique model types. Half of the creatures will be based on standard alien myths, such as Greys, DNA splicing, abductions and the mutilation of cows, with a twist to tie them into the story of *Blue Vault*.

The other three visitors from outer space will be brand new, with no previous frame of reference. One such alien is the Pyrite, basically an intergalactic pest that rides on the back of meteorites and feeds on burning material. In its first incarnation, the Pyrite is just a boulder that will roll towards warmth. Next, the Pyrite transforms into a sentient man-shape and begins igniting small amounts of flammable material nearby. Finally, it becomes the mischievous bulky alien seen here, which sets fire to everything in its path, causing the Blue Vault organisation no end of trouble.



The real half-life...

# STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

Will Porter went all the way to the Ukraine and all he got was a lousy dose of radiation sickness...

## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** GSC Game World

**PUBLISHER** THQ

**WEBSITE** [www.stalker-game.com](http://www.stalker-game.com)

**ETA** Late 2004

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Revolutionary style of free-form gameplay
- Self-contained game world governed solely by NPC AI
- Locations and environments directly recreated from Chernobyl exclusion zone
- Intriguing blend of shooting, role-playing and survival
- Gob-smacking engine and environmental effects

CV



## GSC GAME WORLD

Masters of RTS chin-strokers and nuclear-orientated blasts, this youthful band of Ukrainian programmers is now striking out for FPS glory.

**1995** GSC is founded and begins beaver away at translating US games, encyclopedias and edutainment programs.

**1999** *Warcraft 2000*, GSC's first non-commercial game is made. Using *Warcraft II* as a model, aliens armed with nuclear weapons are pitted against beleaguered humanity. Meanwhile, work begins on *Cossacks: European Wars*.

**2003** After several *Cossacks* add-on packs, GSC makes its first foray into the world of shooters with the completion of *FireStarter* – a distinctly average FPS with RPG elements.

**2004** Work continues on both *STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl* and *Cossacks 2: Napoleonic Wars*.

**WE ARE** creatures of habit. Despite the fact that washing machines have dials with 12 settings on, we religiously use the one that says 'non-fast colours (destruction of clothes doubtful)', whether we're removing the smells from pants, curtains or chainmail. We buy the same brands and products, week in, week out. We eat the same safe curries when we go for an Indian. We watch so much bad TV that Jasper Carrott still has a career. Change is bad, and if something is broken, then there's no point in fixing it as people are stupid and they'll buy it anyway.

The same is true of the first-person shooter. For years they've been churning them out from the same cut-and-paste stamping machine – man with gun walks through corridor. Man with gun shoots things.

Man with gun walks through new corridor harbouring further shooting inclinations. The times they are a-changing, though, what with games like *Far Cry* providing us with relatively free-form assaults; yet even Jack Carver's muscle-bound antics progress in a straight line from action bubble to action bubble, interior to exterior, beach to mountain, kill to kill.

## GEIGER COUNTER

It takes balls to fundamentally change things, but that is exactly the intention of *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*. Essentially the game where *Morrowind* and *Soldier Of Fortune* collide, it's a game that aims to give you unrestrained exploration and adventure in a self-contained radioactive wasteland. As the game's lead designer Alexey Silyanov explained to us: "The whole world lives out its life; an absolutely artificial world controlled by artificial intelligence. It learns, it advances. It's absolutely a real world. We're trying to make a place where the player lives; where the player is given an individual experience."

In 2006, *STALKER* lore suggests that another nuclear tragedy strikes Chernobyl, although nobody knows quite why or how. The government, horrified that strange creatures seem to be roaming the hills around the

already toxic and empty Ukrainian towns and villages,







You modify your arsenal with scopes, different ammo and the like.



The most beautiful in-game crane ever?



Look who's stalking...

## ZONE IN THE ZONE

INTREPID ROVING REPORTER WILL PORTER  
ENTERS THE FORBIDDEN ZONE



Will. Looking a bit chilly.

You realise you've got an odd job when you stumble on to a bus in central Kiev at 4.30am, fall asleep and wake up at a military checkpoint that guards the toxic land that lies around the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster. You also begin to realise how lucky you are to live a relatively uneventful life when faced by a town like Pripjat, the worker's town that lies a short walk away from the site of the breached reactor. It can't have been that pleasant to live there in the first place, but its empty shell of rotten apartment blocks, hollowed-out shop fronts and rusting hammers and sickles serve as

a warning to any society that runs over-confidence in parallel to under-funding.

*STALKER* doesn't look like it's on track to trivialise the thousands of lives cut short by the Chernobyl disaster – in fact, its creators hope it will remind people of an event they feel is dangerously close to being remembered only by the history books. Whatever, entering the zone and seeing the devastation was a haunting experience.





## RADIATION AND THE REALITY

GSC GAME WORLD RECREATES THE EXCLUSION ZONE IN REMARKABLE DETAIL



Real life vs digital life: Pripjat in its opposing forms.

If you're fearful that *STALKER* is going to jump on the disaster-exploitation bandwagon, rest assured that the team at GSC Game World are local boys from Kiev, and so are all too aware of the tragic repercussions of the radioactive cloud that hovered over the Ukraine back in 1986.

The team has also gone to remarkable lengths to accurately recreate the nuclear installations of the Chernobyl complex and the ghost towns and villages that surround it. "We took a lot of time and effort to recreate the Chernobyl sarcophagus, the ghost city of



Pripjat, empty villages, the 'Red Forest', the vehicle cemetery and various other settings," explains Oleg Yavorsky. "But it would be a bit boring just recreating the whole zone 100 per cent. In the finished product, we've changed the landscape quite a bit and the distances between the key objects. So it'll be about 60 per cent authentic to real life."



proclaims the territory a forbidden zone. Army helicopters patrol the skies while scavengers known as stalkers duke it out in the radioactive wastes, trying to find and trade artefacts imbued with strange powers. You play as one of these gun-toting stalkers – but whether you play as a helpful character who joins up with the various stalker gangs and cults, or one who hates company and shoots on sight is up to you.

## IT'S AN AI WORLD

GSC Game World's intention is to create a world governed purely by AI and not necessarily the player's whims. NPCs and monsters won't be standing around waiting for you to turn up, they'll be roaming around the 30-square kilometres of forbidden zone available

Put simply, this means that death can come from any angle as monsters can be anywhere. In one scenario of a build I played in GSC Game World's lair, I tracked down the same stalker three times to steal an artefact he was carrying. I played the same level three times and on the third occasion I got to his hideout only to find that the dynamic nature of the game meant he'd already been killed and gnawed-on by a pack of helpful and hungry irradiated dogs.

So it's a role-player then? "Well it's quite like *Morrowind*," says Silyanov. "It also bears similarities to *Fallout* in that it's a post-nuclear world where you can go everywhere you want and do anything you want."

"However, what makes it different is that you don't advance your character –

**"It's quite like *Morrowind*, but also like *Fallout* in that it's a post-nuclear world where you can do anything you like"**

ALEXEY SILYANOV LEAD DESIGNER, GSC GAME WORLD

to them – foraging for food, hunting, fighting, exchanging messages, trading and communicating with each other. That's not all, though: their guiding AI is also set to react to environmental triggers. "All of the monsters and NPCs have their habits, likes and dislikes," explains chief *STALKER* spokesperson Oleg Yavorsky. "On top of this, hunger and threat will determine how aggressive a creature is. If the weather is foggy, then the creatures and stalkers will have trouble seeing, since all of them have virtual sight and hearing."

there are no stats or skills. But every time you play, you should still advance more: you start to understand what you should wear and buy, being able to afford more armour, better guns and so on." It's also worth noting that the traditional RPG inventory system, cruelly ditched by *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, is back with a vengeance here.

What's more, there are eight possible endings and 70-80 hours of playing time (30-40 if you're not in the mood for dawdling). Plus, if you don't want to follow the key missions, it's



"Duh! I said I'd be wearing the post-apocalyptic hazard suit."



Real people with real lives once lived in *STALKER*'s battlegrounds.

possible that one of your rival stalkers will complete the most linear path through the game before you're even halfway through.

## I GET KNOCKED DOWN...

However, *STALKER* is about survival as much as it is about shooting or playing through an exercise in role-play-lite. You and your fellow stalkers have to find the resources to keep you alive – and what's more, you have to find a safe place to curl up and slumber so that you don't wake up with wild animals nibbling your privates. If you run out of food and get hungry, you'll feel faint; and if you're low on supplies, you'll have to shoot down a bird or a mutant rat and feast on that, even if you have to quell any radioactive after-effects with a bottle of vodka.

No forbidden wasteland, meanwhile, can be without its fair share of radiation pockets and mysterious anomalies; gravity fields that can squash you or rip you apart, fogs that dissolve the skin off your body and rusty hair that grows on exposed metallic surfaces and chars any flesh that strays too close. Life in the hazardous wastes isn't exactly a



picnic, and if it was then you'd need more than a tartan rug and a thermos of weak lemon drink to fend off death. The tools of the stalker trade include double-barrelled shotguns, an updated version of the Dragunov sniper rifle, heavy machine guns and the always-useful revolving grenade launcher.

While the lion's share of the beasts and villains that you'll be perforating are still hidden behind a wisp of radioactive fog, my hands-on in Kiev with the early build saw me battling packs of wild hounds (each at varying stages of mutation), giant rats (because I suppose even quasi-RPGs need giant rats), horrible brown zombie creatures with mouths like bloody octopuses and a variety of grizzly rival NPC stalkers.

### NUCLEAR FALL-OUT

It need hardly be mentioned in these days of next-gen shooter hype that *STALKER* looks drop-dead gorgeous, or that it has a fully comprehensive physics engine – take it as read. It's the proposed open-ended gameplay and elements like the dynamic day/night cycle that actively changes around you (unlike *Far Cry*'s, admittedly beautiful, inter-level time shifts) that are really exciting. Combine this with the fogs, mists, rain and wind that'll actually interact with the AI (affecting things like the migration of pack animals and stalker sleeping patterns) and you've got a hugely interesting proposal.

At the moment, however, we're yet to be entirely convinced by *STALKER*. There's no doubt



**STALKER is very much the dark horse in the *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3* war of attrition – but it could be revolutionary.**

that if GSC Game World manages to pull off its FPS coup d'état, we'll have a stunning game on our hands – but it's going to be a Herculean task. The company's firm stance against scripting and the proposed anytime/anywhere/anything aspect of combat will be in direct odds to the finely tuned fire-fights we'll be seeing from *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*,

and it's hard to see how it could be as immediately satisfying.

That said, it's perhaps an unfair comparison seeing as *STALKER* is a different type of game – a blueprint for a true revolution in the FPS genre. Plus, we'll have to wait and see just how non-linear the final product will be. One thing's for sure, though: *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl* has massive potential. [E]



**The ladder: problem area of the FPS.**



**Looking a little paranoid there, fella...**

### MUTANTS IN THE MIST

**WE CAN'T REVEAL TOO MANY MONSTER DETAILS, BUT...**



**Monster mayhem.**

An online competition for monster suggestions took place a while back, with its winners being promised a star-turn for their creations in the game.

Winners of this contest were the Snork, a humanoid mutant with a skull that resembles a gas mask and who can gambol about on two legs as well as four. Even more interesting is the Luller, a creature that can imitate any voice it wants. So if you're trekking through the wilderness and suddenly hear a woman comforting

a crying baby, or a man screaming and calling for help, then it could well be a Luller luring you into its claws. Sounds exciting, doesn't it?

Another creature-feature, although a slightly more bizarre one, emerged towards the end of my interview with Alexey Silyanov – despite being tampered by one or two translation difficulties: "Another mutant I like is a telepathic [obscure Russian word]. You know? Small guys who are telekinetic." You mean telekinetic dwarves? "No, not dwarves. Like humans, but small. And mutants." So they're midgets? Telekinetic mutant midgets? "Yes. I think so." Remember, you heard it here first folks...



**Vehicles will be present, all of them Russian-built affairs.**

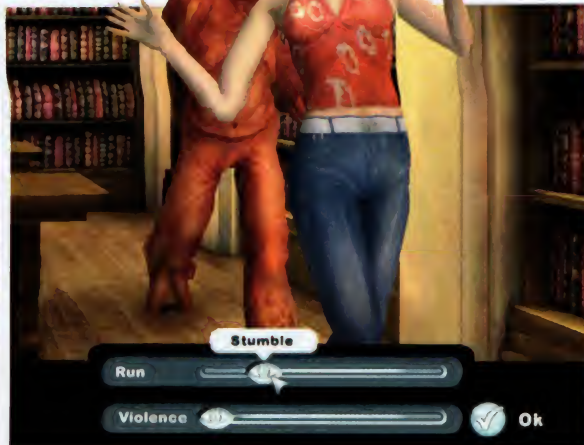




You can sell stars on ebay for real cash, or on the awards website for virtual money.

## Hooray for Hollywood... THE MOVIES

Steve Hill discovers there's no business like show business



Tweak your stars' action bar from one extreme to the other.



Rooftop sets enable you to pull off the classic *Batman* shot.

### THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Lionhead Studios  
**PUBLISHER** Activision  
**WEBSITE** [www.themoviesgame.com](http://www.themoviesgame.com)  
**ETA** 2004

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The latest brainchild of Peter Molyneux
- Variety of gaming challenges
- Lets you make mucky films
- PC ZONE's Mark Hill's in it!

CV



### LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Formed by Peter Molyneux and the cream of the Guildford development scene, Lionhead Studios has been working on innovative games ever since.

**2001** *Black & White*. Finally released following years of hype, it split opinion between work of genius, over-ambitious folly or that really late game with the cows in it.

**2002** *Black & White: Creature Isles*. The official expansion pack ditched a lot of the tedious micro-management and introduced a talking horse. Which is always a winner in our book.

**WITH THE** ever-increasing convergence of films and games, it was only a matter of time before somebody made a game about the movie industry. Following a slew of abysmal game-to-film conversions, the chance to redress the balance has been taken up by Lionhead.

Appropriately enough, the first public showing of *The Movies* came in London at BAFTA, as part of its Interactive Festival held in February. In front of an audience of game and film industry luminaries, Lionhead boss Peter Molyneux unveiled the latest build, which he and his team had been assembling until 3am the same morning, a year to the day since development began. Over the course of an hour, Molyneux explained the concept behind the game while his able assistant Adrian Moore put the embryonic code through its paces, the pair of them visibly relieved that it managed to hold together.

### LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

First impressions hint at the trademark Molyneux simulation, and if we were being flippant we could lazily describe it as 'Theme Movies'. However, as Molyneux explained, there's far more to *The Movies* than merely a Hollywood-flavoured *Theme Park*, although studio management does

play a key role in the core game. Spanning over a century of film, from the early days of silent movies to the near future, the idea is to build and run a successful studio, turning a profit by releasing commercially viable movies.

Clearly, the variables involved in that formula are vast. As Molyneux admits: "How any movie is ever made, I'll never know. It's a system which absolutely terrifies me – it's quite bizarre."

The same can be said of his game, although it can be broken down into three

basic elements: building the studio, creating and managing your stars and making movies. The first part will be the most familiar to seasoned gamers, and as Molyneux admits, the similarities with *Theme Park* are evident. Buildings vary from restaurants to swimming pools to the ubiquitous trailers where actors while away the hours between takes.

Naturally, a smaller trailer will be less expensive, but this may only be a short-term saving. Attempting







Science fiction – just one of the many genres in *The Movies*.



An actual photo of the outside of Lionhead Studios.



"Get the probe warmed up – humans are on the way."



You too can create a typical romantic-comedy.

## THAT'S NOT ALL FOLKS!



Movies aren't all fun. Just ask Ben.

### ADD-ON AD NAUSEUM

The creative comparison to *The Sims* has been made, but it seems to be a commercial inspiration too, with three add-on packs already planned. *Director's Cut* offers far greater control over the movie-making process, enabling you to shift cameras and control lighting. *Superstars* enhances the meddling into the lives of the stars in a *Sims* fashion, while *Hollywood Spectacular* has a host of extra sets and props.

to house your egotistical lead actor in a caravan more suited to a weekend in Colwyn Bay may cause repercussions that can jeopardise your movie.

This is expanded further in the second area of the game, which should appeal to those drunk on the mindless minutiae of strangers' lives, poring over celebrity gossip rags in search of a cheap fix of scandal to blot out the inevitable inferiority of their own meaningless existence. Films would be nothing without stars, and *The Movies* enables you to groom young starlets from the nascent days of precocious talent, through the inevitable

based on your real-life favourites. The BAFTA demo boasted Nicole Kidman and Keanu Reeves, with a legal loophole ensuring that as long as you type the names in yourself, Lionhead is absolved from all misrepresentation. It hopes.

### SHAVING RYAN'S PRIVATES

And finally – and perhaps most interestingly – is the making of the actual movies themselves. Numerous decisions have to be made here, such as what genre to opt for, bearing in mind the real-life timeline that exists throughout the game. Attempting to make *Star Wars* in

**"One of the costumes is nakedness and you can enhance certain body parts too"**

PETER MOLYNEUX LIONHEAD STUDIOS

sexual and narcotic indiscretions to the bloated plastic surgery excesses of their diminishing usefulness.

Using the morphing technology from *Black & White*, the facial appearance of stars will be tweakable in the extreme, enabling you to create a stable of stars

the 1920s may be ambitious, but it's also likely to confound the critics. And while introducing an on-screen kiss in the 1930s might be hailed as a risqué stroke of genius, having your lead actress taken roughly from behind during the same period may see your studio closed down.

As for the practicalities of movie-making, you will need the requisite actors, sets, technicians and people to operate cameras and sound, the quality of whom will affect the eventual outcome of the film. For instance, hiring a cheap soundman will result in your film being blighted by the perennial howler of the boom looming into view. Likewise, if you fail to keep your camera technology up to date, your modern flick will be screened in grain-o-vision. And the films in

*The Movies* are more than mere concepts – we're talking watchable short films that can be emailed to friends or posted on a bespoke awards website, with the awards then imported back into the game.

*The Movies* is a somewhat bewildering concept to take in, and as you'd expect from Lionhead, it's an extremely ambitious project. If even half the ideas it's mooted work out, it should be a truly unique piece of software. As for providing an enjoyable, playable gaming experience, that will







Behind the scenes of the magic of Hollywood.

probably depend on what aspects are of particular interest to the individual player.

#### THAT REMINDS ME...

Traditional management fans should enjoy the strategic and financial aspect of building the studio, whereas the creation of stars will be meat and drink to keen enthusiasts of *The Sims*. The parallels are clear to see, with dressing the stars up in various costumes an integral part of making movies. As Molyneux admits: "*The Sims* is a great inspiration. It's completely changed the profile of people

playing computer games. It's a great example of allowing people to express themselves creatively and uniquely."

As for the films themselves, fans of cinema should be in their element, with opportunities to create homages to all your favourites, as well as home-grown avant-garde classics. Molyneux also predicts that more 'specialist' movies will be forthcoming: "I think we're going to see thousands of movies floating round the Internet, all totally unique, some of which I'm sure are going to be absolutely in the worst possible taste. I know there

are going to be tons and tons of obscene movies coming out on the Web. One of the costumes is nakedness, which you can use if you want to – you can also enhance certain parts of the body, both male and female. That's going to result in some pretty bizarre movies."

#### PORN FREE

While all the examples we saw were under a minute long, Molyneux insists that it will be possible to create a full-length movie, with the option to include your own voices for some truly creative output. There's even talk of attempting to get an entry in the Sundance Film Festival – certainly the machinima phenomenon (as covered in last issue's Special Report) will benefit from another way of producing quality CG movies.

"I think a lot of people will buy it for making their own movies, but then they'll get hooked on the game," says Molyneux. "The concept is pretty mass market because everyone knows the movies, but I'm trying to make a game that's as playable as *The Sims* and *Theme Park*." And one that lets you make amateur porn films. **[E]**

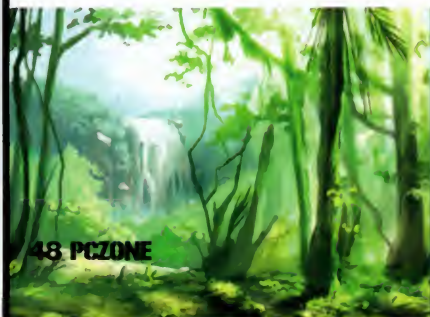
## Why Don't You?...

### NOW SHOWING

To keep the game current, it would be a nice idea to make downloadable sets and props available based on current box office hits. There's talk of releasing a series of licensed add-on packs based on particular films, but Lionhead should just knock them out for free. It can afford it, after all...



See if you can win 11 OSCARS...



48 PCZONE





Why settle for one...







How not to attack an enemy tower – get yourself some catapults first.



Jurassic Park meets Warlords Battlecry.

War is brewing...

# WARLORDS BATTLECRY III

Martin Korda sounds the horn for this Warlords RTS instalment

## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Enlight Interactive  
**PUBLISHER** Enlight Software  
**WEBSITE** [www.enlight.com/wbc3](http://www.enlight.com/wbc3)  
**ETA** Q2 2004

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's Warlords!
- New hero development system
- Three new spheres of magic
- Five new races and 30 new spells

**AND SO** the Warlords strategy bandwagon rolls on, its entourage of six titles – four turn-based, two RTS – about to be joined by game number seven and RTS number three – *Warlords Battlecry III*. But with the recently released *Warlords IV* proving that the turn-based series still has plenty of life left in it, can *Battlecry III* do the same for the Warlords RTS collection? Well, funny you should ask actually, as we just happen to have the latest preview

code right here, so why don't we dive in and find out what's on offer? Follow me...

First up, the graphics engine has been given a spring clean apparently – but to be honest, it's difficult to see what's changed since the last game. However, while the visuals may be akin to the doodlings of a two-fingered orang-utan, remember that the Warlords games have never been about looks. So let's move on to what really counts.

## RACE RELATIONS

What struck us most about *Battlecry III* is the sheer amount of options, including 16 races to play as or against (there were 11 in *Battlecry II*). We tried out all of the five new races, of which two – Knights and Empire – proved similar to the Human race in the last version. However, the other three were far more imaginative.

The Ssrathi, a primitive but deadly lizard race was our favourite, with units including a T Rex, pterodactyl and triceratops. The Plaguelords, a nation of mysterious swamp creatures offered towering Hydras and electrocuting floating eyes, while the Swarm came equipped with an array of bees, giant ants, scorpions and crushingly powerful scorpion men.



Anyone fancy an omelette?

As with all the Warlords games, your troops are led by a hero whose sphere of influence gives nearby units combat bonuses. However, heroes can also gain experience, level-up and specialise in a host of different skills. And of course, we mustn't forget to mention their incantation-packed spell books that can play a major role in swinging the outcome of a battle. Although they're yet to be added, we've also been promised 30 new spells (and three new spheres of magic), bringing the total to an impressive 130.

You can also look forward to an all-new hero development system, which we can happily say is far more intuitive than before. You'll have countless new attributes to develop too, while gaining levels is now quicker and easier. What's more, you'll be able to take your hero all the way up to level 50 and then use them and their ever-growing retinue in multiplayer games.

From what we've seen of it, there's a wealth of gameplay under the ugliness here – despite the dated visuals, it's looking like fans of the series won't be disappointed. In fact, *Battlecry III* is just like that close, opposite-sexed, pizza-faced friend of yours. You'll want to spend loads of time with it, but you wouldn't want to shag it. [A-]



Protecting your base and resources is every bit as important as attacking.



...when you can play the field?



Supercar



4x4



Open Wheel



Truck



Supertruck



Vintage



GT



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Formula Ford



Hotrod



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Ice Racing



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# We've been expecting you... EVIL GENIUS

Bond-wannabe **Jamie Sefton** dons his M&S suit and swagger to uncover Elixir's 1960s strategy spy spoof spectacular



Genetic freak fights mutant chimp. Tomorrow's sport on BBC1.

## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Elixir Studios

**PUBLISHER** VU Games

**WEBSITE** [www.howevilareyou.com](http://www.howevilareyou.com)

**ETA** September

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Comedy RTS from the makers of *Republic: The Revolution*
- Play a supervillain in a Bond/Austin Powers-style universe
- Colourful, cartoon graphic style with funny animations
- No micro-management of resources

CV

ELIXIR  
STUDIOS

## ELIXIR STUDIOS

Elixir Studios was founded in 1998 by Demis Hassabis, who had previously worked with industry legend Peter Molyneux at Bullfrog, creating ground-breaking titles such as *Theme Park*.

**2003** Although released late last year, *Republic: The Revolution* was actually Elixir's first commercial title since the company was set up five years earlier. Set in the Soviet Union-esque republic of Novistrana, you must use your Machiavellian political and social skills to topple the government and rule the country. We loved *Republic* and gave it 88 per cent back in issue 132.

**FAR FROM** torturing programmers with laser beams that threaten the jaffas, or constructing piranha pits for unsuspecting secretaries to fall into, Elixir Studios' creative director Demis Hassabis was a very happy mastermind when *PC ZONE* visited his Camden base of operations to see his latest creation, *Evil Genius*.

"We've now reached the alpha stage – all the major features are in and we're on schedule," said the ever-enthusiastic Hassabis. "This is now all about getting the learning curve just right, tweaking the interface and solving AI glitches. We're going to really polish the game, which we

**"Your island appears to be the sort of idyllic tourist destination that Sarah Greene would visit on *Holiday 2004*"**

didn't get the chance to do on *Republic: The Revolution*. We don't want that problem again."

Unless you've been living in an underground lair for the past 12 months, you'll know that *Evil Genius* is a kitsch 1960s spy-themed strategy simulation,



There are dozens of different ways you can interrogate suspects.

where you play the role of an insane James Bond-style megalomaniac. Your aim is to construct a hidden base and populate it with expendable minions and psychotic henchmen (see 'Hired Muscle', opposite page). You'll then be able to slowly increase your influence and notoriety, before bringing the world to its knees with a terrifying doomsday weapon.

## SMOOTH OPERATOR

You begin the game clutching one-hundred-meeillion dollars in your sweaty palms, before choosing which of the three evil geniuses you'd like to be – Blofeld-lookalike Maximillion, melodramatic

femme fatale Alexis, or a yet to be revealed secret character that Hassabis mentioned was his favourite.

You then have to pick a desert island to use as your HQ and can start building up your lair, making sure that, on the surface, it appears to be the kind of idyllic

tourist destination that Sarah Greene would visit with her hubby and kids on *Holiday 2004*. Yet under the feet of the Greene family staying in their plush hotel, you'll be secretly constructing biological research labs, control rooms, holding cells and trap-laden corridors teeming with nefarious workers. You eventually evacuate to move to a larger, more impressive tropical island. There, you can add the finishing touches to your weapon of mass destruction...

Ensuring that *Evil Genius* is always accessible and instantly enjoyable for gamers is something that Elixir feels is very important, so there'll be no tedious micro-management or complex interfaces to negotiate. Your minions will react automatically to any situation around the base such as putting out fires caused by saboteurs, going to the doctor to get treated for injuries and collecting suspicious-looking enemy body bags and hiding them in the cold room.

Minions are split into military, social and science categories, with five different kinds available to create,



## HIRED MUSCLE

### HENCHMEN ARE THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN *EVIL GENIUS*

Although your minions play an important part in any evil machinations to rule the world, your henchmen (like Jaws and Oddjob of *James Bond* infamy) are the frontline in the constant battle against the Forces of Justice. A total of 12 henchmen are available in *Evil Genius*, each with their own unique abilities and special powers. Ivan, for example, is a Russian Spetsnaz with a lethal Cossack grenade jig; while Papa Lazaru is a voodoo priest possessing a long-range doll attack and black magic that can turn agents from different regions against each other. Hassabis reckons that at any time, you could have up to half a dozen henchmen working for you, but you have to be careful – some henchmen despise each other and will make your secret base an interpersonal relationship war zone.



Papa Lazaru – one of the game's nasty henchmen.

including diplomats for bribing people or engineers to set up your missile programme. Training is a matter of specifying how many of a certain type of minion you want, then as long as you have the resources, they'll level-up with improved stats and abilities. So for example, you can train up a batch of guards to become lethal mercenaries with just a click of your mouse.

### MONKEY BUSINESS

The latest code of *Evil Genius* now includes a global domination map. This shows the five different regions of the world for executing the 20 or so scripted

missions that are unlocked as your notoriety increases. "You make the decisions about how many technicians and other personnel you send on the mission, then once you've got the right equipment in place, you authorise the go," explained Hassabis. "Depending on what set-up you choose, they'll either succeed or not. If you fail, there'll be a lot of heat created in the region you attacked and a lot of your minions will be dead. If you're successful, whatever you wanted – such as a shrunken Eiffel Tower – will get taken back to your base."

Creating 'heat' in a region of the world by completing acts of infamy inevitably



Get private healthcare when you work for an evil genius.



Tourists come to your island base unknowingly. Keep them happy with a casino.

alerts the local Forces of Justice agents, who will soon make their way to your island via dinghy, sub or helicopter to cause you mayhem. There are six levels of agent for each territory, ranging from your basic Navy SEALs right up to the almost-invincible super-agents that include Bond-clone John Steele. You'll soon learn which parts of your island are vulnerable to attack and can set up fiendish traps and silly distractions to see off the hapless agents, including minefields, coconut grenades and mutant monkeys.

### WHAT A GAS

However, a supervillain is nothing without his doomsday machine and the game has a quality selection on offer, each with a choice of delivery vehicles and payloads, depending on which technology path you pursue. "For example, there's a cloning

gas delivered by rocket that explodes in the atmosphere and turns everyone into an exact carbon copy of your evil genius," Hassabis told us.

*Evil Genius* has certainly progressed since we last saw the game back in the autumn, aptly demonstrated by the excellent new main menu screen parodying those chic Bond film intro sequences created in the 1960s by designer Maurice Binder, complete with a John Barry music pastiche.

There are also now over 1,000 fantastic hand-drawn cartoon animations, created over a period of two years. If the 25-strong *Evil Genius* development team can continue this dedication and attention to detail, Demis Hassabis will have no choice but to release his loyal and hardworking Elixir captives when this promising RTS romp launches in September. **EW**



Gloating over captured agents will increase your notoriety.



Ninjas drop in to cause kung-fu chaos.



Body bags are removed by tireless valets.



# CHALLENGE TODAY,



NEVERA<<



# SHAPE TOMORROW



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# REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

## THE SHOW MUST GO ON!



■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Anthony Holden

▲ The weeping and lamentation of womenfolk can only mean one thing: Martin Korda has left the building. Yes, the hulking, bouncer-like presence that once graced this column is gone, his threatening bulk squeezed into an unflattering thumbnail below. Fear not though, as you'll still see plenty of him in his new freelance capacity (starting on pages 64, 76, 80 and the newly revived Supertest on page 84).

Sadly, my first month at the helm of the good ship Reviews Section has not been greeted with the stellar line-up I'd hoped for. There are some solid games in the mix to be sure, but more than one letdown as well, starting with *Breed* on page 70. We've been talking this game up for three years, ever since we first discovered it at E3 2001. Back then, we said it 'promised to be a fun arcade blast 'em up on an epic scale', and I suppose on that basis we haven't been disappointed too much.

Unfortunately, the game has since been built up as a kind of poster child for the continued viability of indie development. With a team of only a dozen or so developers, Brat Designs looked set to buck industry trends and show the top publishers how to make great games on a shoestring – and the team almost got there. By creating an engine as good-looking and versatile as Mercury, they did most of the hard work – they just didn't follow it through with any real conviction.

We can only hope that the failure of *Breed* is not seen as the failure of indie development in general, and we wish Brat the best of luck on its next title.

Luckily, there's good news as well, with *Pandora Tomorrow* (page 58) proving that the big studios are still willing to take risks on innovative ideas. Just as long as they're hedging their bets elsewhere, of course...



The high-tech stealth actioner returns with a unique take on multiplayer action. Find out if it flies on page 58.

## THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

## OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to [letters@pczone.co.uk](mailto:letters@pczone.co.uk) and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

## ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

## OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

## MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

*Far Cry*

What are you currently playing?

What's the first thing you'd do if you were as stealthy as Sam Fisher?

I'd stand in the goalmouth at Highfield Road and provide extra cover for Scott Shearer

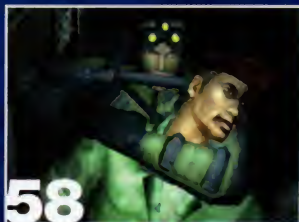


JAMIE SEFTON

*Halo* and *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*

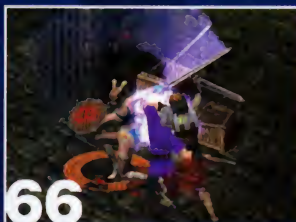
Kidnap a Russian billionaire and force him to buy Leeds Utd at gunpoint





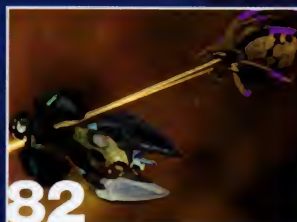
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**PANDORA TOMORROW**  
Can it retain the stealth crown?



66

**SACRED**  
*Diablo*-style hacking reborn



82

**FEEDBACK**  
Let us feel your wrath!



84

**SUPERTEST**  
Third-person shooters on test

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82 **FEEDBACK**  
YOUR VIEWS, REVIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE LATEST GAMES

84 **SUPERTEST: THIRD-PERSON SHOOTERS**

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND, IT'S THE ALL-NEW PC ZONE SUPertest, JUST LIKE IT WAS BEFORE, ONLY BETTER!



**ANTHONY HOLDEN**

*PlanetSide* and *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*

Slaughter my enemies and leave their bodies hidden under the stairs



**PAUL PRESLEY**

*PlanetSide*, *X2* and a little bit more *PlanetSide*

Start my own lightbulb-replacement company



**WILL PORTER**

*Morrowind*, *KOTOR* and *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*

Sit in my neighbour's living room every Thursday so I can watch 24 without paying for Sky



**MARTIN KORDA**

*Call Of Duty*, *Medieval* and *Unreal II: XMP*

Eat kebab meat straight from the rotisserie



**STEVE HILL**

*Championship Manager: Season 03/04*

Go on the rob



**RICHIE SHOEMAKER**

*Savage* and *UT2004*

Have a dump. With the door wide open





# SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft | ETA: April 1 | [www.splintercell.com/uk](http://www.splintercell.com/uk)

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, broadband Internet connection

**What would you do if you were invisible to the casual eye, agile as a Russian gymnast and armed to the teeth with high-tech spy tackle? Anthony Holden finds out the disturbing truth...**







And lo, there was light, and Sam Fisher saw that it was bad.



It's just asking for trouble walking around with all that metal on your head.



Damn TV inspectors – they get craftier every year.

## INPERSPECTIVE

### METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

Reviewed Issue 127, Score 83%

When *Metal Gear Solid 2* first came out on PC it was already looking a little dated – now, it's positively obsolete. However, if you like interactive movies with impenetrable plotlines, this is the stealth-actioner for you.

### DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

Reviewed Issue 137, Score 86%

One of the biggest criticisms levelled at *Splinter Cell* is its strict linearity, and if any game is the antidote to that it has to be *Invisible War*. There's stealth in there if you want it, but this cyberpunk role-player is as versatile as they come.

**TELL YOU** what, it's a damn good thing computer screens have that nice bright glow about them, as I'm currently writing this review in complete pitch darkness. Not because I think I'm Sam Fisher and have to stay in the shadows all the time – that would just be ridiculous. No, it's just that I shot out all the light bulbs in my house the other day – just to save on electricity, mind. And I only used the silenced pistol so as not to upset the neighbours. They were already a bit put out after I made their dog stop barking, though I used the silencer then as well, so I don't know what

they're bloody complaining about. Maybe they're terrorists? Perhaps I'll pay them a visit later and see if I can... 'neutralise' the situation.

### I DIGRESS...

But where were we? By sheer coincidence, and not at all connected to my recent behaviour, the subject of today's review is third-person sneak 'em up, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*. Coming little more than a year after the original took the stealth-action genre to new heights, the follow-up promises eight huge new missions and an exciting new multiplayer game mode.

But what is it? An expansion pack? A sequel? A pseudo-sequel expansion pack? Well, it's all of these things, and yet none. Confusing I know, but that's the nature of things when you're working for a top-secret branch of the CIA. Which of

course I'm not. Let's have a look at the game then.

From the first moments, it's good to be back. As soon as the curtain rises on the magnificently sun-drenched insertion point, *Pandora Tomorrow* reminds us why we

## SPY TALK

### WHISPER SWEET NOTHINGS IN P7 MULTIPLAYER

Another influence of the Xbox version on *Pandora Tomorrow*'s multiplayer game is a huge emphasis on voice communication. With a headset in place you can liaise constantly with your partner, co-ordinating attacks and setting up diversions, ambushes and hit-and-run attacks. As a spy, you can hack into the mercenary voice channel by tagging them with a spy bullet, and you can even whisper threateningly in their ears when you've got them in a headlock. Superb.







"This is the last time I fly EasyJet!"

loved its precursor so much. The faultless presentation, the immaculate looks, the beyond-Bond spy kit – everything is as we left it in the world of Third Echelon – and that means great.

A few new features quickly become apparent. The HUD has been streamlined, such that the lock-pick and optic cable are now built-in, context-sensitive items that never appear in your inventory. Enemy alert modes, once vague and amorphous things, have been neatly clarified – trip one alarm and all tangos don flak jackets; slip up twice and they add a helmet.

Dumping unconscious bodies has also been made more transparent, your light meter now flashing helpfully to indicate a safe drop-point. And even Sam Fisher, 'the most reluctantly ageing badass in the

much as ever. The game opens in Indonesia, where the US embassy has been raided by militant insurgents, kicking off a typically close-to-the-knuckle Tom Clancy plotline about anti-US terrorism and bio-engineered virus agents. It's a politically sensitive scenario, so there's a 'no lethal force' order in place for much of the mission (and indeed, the entire solo campaign).

Straight off, I decide to be really clever and beat the no-kill edict with a bit of foul play. Sneaking up and pistol-whipping the terrorist guarding the embassy gates, I proceed to dump his inert form in a stream, thinking there's no way in hell the game is monitoring his oxygen levels. More fool me. Two minutes later, I fail the mission for drowning a man. It

## "The multiplayer game is by far the most impressive aspect of the PT package"

world', has become a little more nimble. On top of his regular wall-peeks and split-jumps, the grizzled gunman can now do half-split-jumps, hang by his legs to shoot, and perform the so-called SWAT turn – a kind of stealthy switcheroo that allows you to pirouette past open doorways with complete discretion. As you'd expect, they're all completely far-fetched and extremely cool.

The sophisticated stealth system also impresses just as

may be a small thing, but to me, that's impressive. It's smart, it's coherent with the gameworld, and it's the sort of thing that makes *Splinter Cell* the best stealth series out there.

### ALL TOO EASY

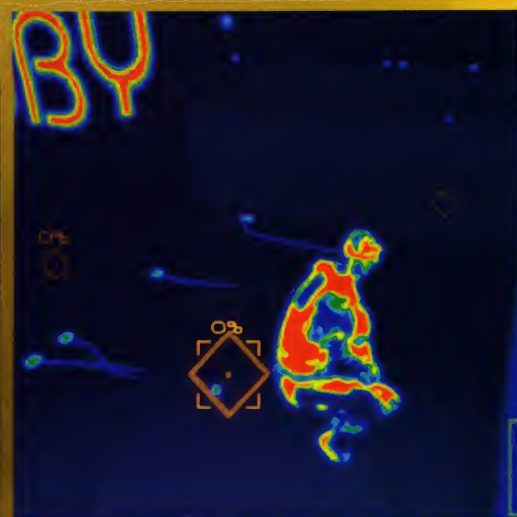
Saying this, *Pandora Tomorrow* is not without its problems. The single-player missions have a definite expansion pack feel to them, because, er, that's exactly what they are. There are some superb moments, which

Sam pops upstairs to put the kettle on.

occasionally surpass what the original game managed – including a cool over-and-under escapade on a train and an excellent *Die Hard*-esque airport mission – and yet the same old criticisms of *Splinter Cell* still apply. The game is still relentlessly linear, the occasional (painfully obvious) choice of pathways somehow only highlighting the lack of genuine decision-making.

Again, the developer has singularly failed to capitalise on some of the best moves and gadgets in the game. Things like the split-jump, heat-vision, human-shield and remote spy-cams are criminally underused.

But perhaps the most significant letdown is the AI. While it hasn't actually got any less advanced since the previous game, it does give that impression, having been watered down in response to



You can't have a quiet dump anywhere these days...



## MISSED OPPORTUNITY

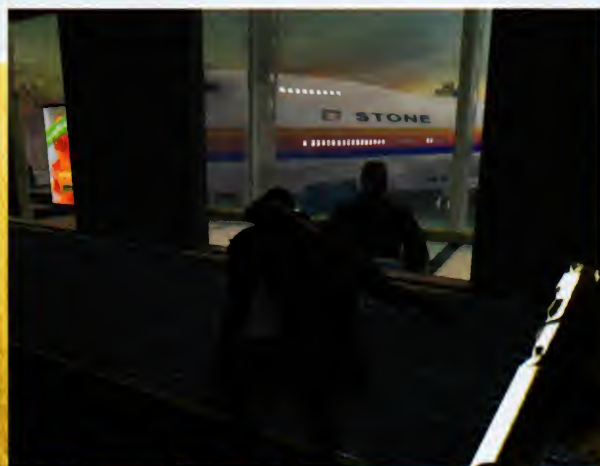


Sam uses his stealth skills to catch up on *Sex And The City*.

You can't play *Pandora Tomorrow*'s multiplayer game without coming up with a dozen cool ways to improve it, but I think this is largely because it's a new and exciting concept with loads of potential for growth. The more relevant missed opportunities are in the single-player missions. One thing that was hinted at by the developer was the idea of setting missions in busy urban areas, with all manner of civilians to worry about as well as any bad guys. The best *Pandora* can muster in this department is a couple of old dudes watching TV or sitting on a bench, which really doesn't cut it.

Clearly, Ubisoft is saving all the best stuff for the real single-player sequel, which rumours suggest is due as early as Christmas. Stay tuned for more news on this very soon.





Not what you need to see at an airport really...

## MULTIPLAYER TIPS: SPIES

### HOW TO SURVIVE IN THE TOPSY-TURVY WORLD OF INTERNATIONAL ESPIONAGE

As a spy in *Pandora Tomorrow* multiplayer, you have to remember one thing: you start off with all the cards in this game. Provided you can stay invisible, the mercenaries are left pretty much, well, in the dark. Trip an alarm though, and the tables are turned – so you'd better have an escape plan ready...



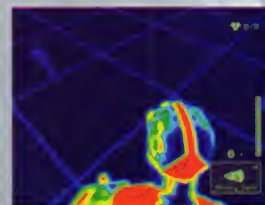
#### WALL-FLIP

If you're being chased with no escape routes, run towards a wall and hold Jump. You'll run straight up the wall into a backflip, à la *Prince Of Persia*. Not only will this confuse your pursuer, if you pull it off right you can land behind them and go straight into a deadly headlock.



#### FIRE EXTINGUISHER

Dotted liberally around the maps, these handy items can be used to your advantage if you're in a tight spot. Simply shoot them, and a cloud of gas will stream out, partially blinding any mercenaries in the vicinity while you make a quick exit.



#### VISION MODES

Just as in the main game, spies have two special vision modes here – night and heat vision. They're absolutely vital for survival, but remember that mercs can see you with their EMF vision when you have them turned on. Use sparingly when hiding from probing eyes.

criticism that the original game was too difficult. But instead of taking the tricky route of rethinking level design or adding new gadgets, the developer has simply made the enemies deaf, blinder and more stupid. NPCs will walk within a foot of your position and not see you, they'll happily ignore the deaths of nearby comrades, they won't bat an eye if you shoot out every light in the room and leave them in pitch blackness, and they'll certainly never leave the room to pursue you.

Not only does this rip holes in the thin gauze of immersion covering our eyes, but it makes

the whole thing a bit on the easy side. Veterans should probably head straight for the Hard mode, and this is never a good sign for game balance.

#### BACK IN BLACK

Despite all this, *Pandora Tomorrow* is still *Splinter Cell*, and as such is great fun. The missions are well designed and full of inventive stealth set-ups, and for me, more of the same is just dandy. But things really haven't progressed very much since the original.

However, before we declare *Pandora Tomorrow* an expansion pack masquerading

as a sequel, let's not forget the really exciting part: the superb, innovative multiplayer game. You see, *Pandora Tomorrow* is actually two games in one. The single-player campaign was developed in France as a straightforward expansion for the original *Splinter Cell* – that's the 'Pandora Tomorrow' bit. Meanwhile, in Shanghai, an entirely different team was working on a new multiplayer concept, dubbed 'Shadownet Vs Mercenaries'.

The basic idea is this. Two teams face off in a brilliant computerised version of hide-and-seek. One team plays in

first-person mode and has all the firepower on its side – that's the mercs. The other team plays in classic stealthy third-person, and has agility, sneakiness and deception on its side – the so-called shadownets. From this brilliant concept, everything else follows naturally.

There are a few different game modes, but basically the mercs have to protect a number of items from being nicked, hacked or otherwise tampered with by the shadownets. To help them in this aim, the levels are littered with motion detectors and hacking monitors

linked to the mercenary comm channel, and they can add to this array by laying spy-traps, trip lasers and proximity mines – all there to cause headaches for the shadownets.

The shadownets are basically wannabe Sam Fishers – junior spies who haven't quite taken the stabilisers off yet. They can perform many of the same moves, such as wall-peeks, split-jumps and whizzing down ziplines, but they're not as invisible or as powerful as Sam himself. Plus, they're only armed with stun guns, flashbangs, diversion cams and the like, so their best



bet is to stay out of sight and only pounce when surprise is most definitely on their side. The result is a superbly balanced game of cat-and-mouse with more tension than Jordan's bra-strap.

#### FOUR ON THE FLOOR

There is however, one caveat. Due to limitations imposed by the Xbox version, there's a maximum of four players in the game. Two-on-two is the default, but you can do handicap matches or even nail-biting one-on-one duels as well. It's an unusual limitation for a PC game, which in recent times have been moving towards more players and bigger environments, but it works surprisingly well.

Apart from the refreshing change of pace, it's a more intimate style of game where every player is a crucial part of the proceedings. The eight levels are well designed and cleverly honeycombed with tunnels and access shafts that only the shadownets can move through. And with teams of just two, co-operation is inescapable. (This, combined with the fact that it's eerily

suited to office LANs, has made for many lost man-hours at PC ZONE in the past two weeks.)

As you can see, we're rather impressed with *Pandora's* new multiplayer game – in fact, we've been quietly lobbying for someone to do something like this for years. Our only real criticism is that, because the two halves of the game have been developed at opposite ends of the Earth, the default control systems for the two are noticeably different. This is

hugely annoying when you come to switching between the two games, but hardly the end of the world.

Quibbles aside, the multiplayer game is by far the more impressive aspect of the *Pandora Tomorrow* package. It's different from any other multiplayer game out there, and it's thoroughly and addictively playable. Indeed, the spies vs mercs game mode has already done wonders for the multiplayer scene in the

ZONE office, and if the PC fraternity can only see past the game's console leanings, it has the potential to do the same online.

Ultimately, the multiplayer game has saved *Pandora Tomorrow* from being simply an above-average expansion pack. The solo missions are undeniably solid, but bundled with one of the coolest and most distinctive multiplayer concepts in years, *Pandora Tomorrow* is essential gaming. **[C+]**



#### SECOND OPINION

PAUL PRESLEY

Ah, *Splinter Cell*. Linear, puzzle game disguised as stealth action spectacular. Ooh, you can hang from ledges and pipes! But not that one. Er, or that one. Or any other that the designers haven't explicitly put there in order to get past a puzzle.

Annoyingly, *Pandora Tomorrow* fixes nothing. And to charge top dollar for a handful of maps is a bit rich. There's nothing here that warrants *Pandora Tomorrow* being a full-on sequel. The multiplayer is interesting, admittedly, but I'm not convinced it will last long once the novelty's worn off. Not in its present form.

Fingers crossed that the 'proper' sequel really does push the boat out. If not, I'm afraid I'll never be the Fisherman's friend.



Grenade-tossing guides: indispensable.



Lethal attacks are permitted.

There's a nice tourniquet animation at health points.

Run! He's spotted you!

### MULTIPLAYER TIPS: MERCS

#### HOW TO TRACK DOWN A PESKY SNEAKER IN *PANDORA TOMORROW* MULTIPLAYER

Hunting spies is not an easy game. You can play it by running around madly hoping to catch one in the act, or you can be a bit clever about it, keeping your eyes open and using the tools at your disposal to their best advantage. Here's a few pointers...



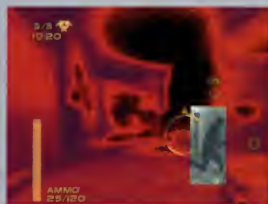
##### TELLTALE SIGNS

As a merc, you have to be watchful for anything that might betray a spy's whereabouts. Things like the laser dots from their weapons and sticky cams on a wall are obvious; clouds of dust dropping down when a spy is creeping around in the ceiling, not so obvious.



##### PHOSPHOR GRENADES

Catch a spy in the blast radius of one of these gadgets and they'll be coated in luminous green paint, making them glow in the dark and leave bright green footprints wherever they go. Perhaps not as decisive as a frag grenade, but if anything even more annoying to spies.



##### DARK VISION

Instead of standard night/heat vision, mercenaries have access to two new vision modes. EMF vision detects active electronic devices, handy including spy goggles, while motion vision highlights moving objects. Learning when to use each of these is crucial.

#### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great new multiplayer game
- ✓ Competent solo missions
- ✓ Two games in one
- ✗ Conspicuous lack of new single-player features
- ✗ Crippled AI in single-player

# 89

Competent single-player, genius multiplayer





# PLAYLOGIC®

game publisher & developer

## WASTING YOUR TALENT? COME WORK WITH US.

This year, Game Publisher & Developer Playlogic, based in the Netherlands, will bring its first 6 titles on several platforms to the market. A number of other European studios, in total approximately 160/170 specialists, are developing titles for Playlogic. One of them is its in-house studio in Breda, The Netherlands.

This very modern studio, which has 70 workstations, is looking for new talent. Having finished 2 titles - Cyclone Circus (PS2) and Xyanide (Xbox Live) - the team of 55 is currently working on a new title for which it needs talented and experienced team players, who are well organized, proactive communicators and who know how to coherently prioritize the workload.

### CONCEPT ARTIST / DIGITAL MATTE PAINTER

#### Required skills :

- Create designs swiftly and efficiently.
- Create clear and transparent designs.
- Good technical and mechanical knowledge: have a genuine interest in machines and their logic and a notion of the latest developments in this technology.
- Able to represent hyper realistic environments and characters (humans, animals and aliens) through high quality lighting and color skills (comparable to realism) and a strong knowledge of anatomy.
- Experience with Photoshop is a must - 3D software a plus.
- At least 3 years of professional experience is required.

#### Requirements of the portfolio :

- Designs of vehicles - fictional or non fictional.
- Designs expressing technical knowledge and interest.
- At least 3 examples of matt paintings expressing a good feeling with atmosphere and realism.
- Extra designs related to weapons and military are a plus.

### LEVEL DESIGNER

#### Required skills :

- Proven experience with first person shooters.
- The ability to take direction well and work with and through others.
- Feeling with gameplay.
- Feeling with visual content; know how to impress the player with visual content.
- Creative input .
- Good technical skills, creative with the limitations of real-time effects.
- At least 3 years experience in the games industry is required.

#### Requirements of the portfolio :

- Must include samples

### SOUND DESIGNER

#### Required skills :

- Feeling with visual content.
- Creative input.
- The ability to take direction well.
- Good technical skills, creative with the limitations of real-time effects.
- At least 3 years experience in games industry (movie experience is a plus).

#### Requirements of the portfolio :

- Must include sound samples in combination with video.

### TEXTURE ARTIST

#### Required skills :

- Thorough knowledge of materials (how they look, react and interact with environments and shapes).
- Knowledge of modern shading techniques used in games or non-realtime render engines.
- Knowledge of color and composition.
- Thorough knowledge of UV mapping, 3D software, Photoshop and Deeppaint is a must.
- Knowledge of 3D Max or Lightwave is a plus.
- At least 3 years professional experience is required.

#### Requirements of the portfolio :

- Examples of high res model texturing.
- Games models.
- Drawings and design showing a good sense of realism, atmosphere and feeling for light.

### LEAD CHARACTER ANIMATOR

#### Required skills :

- Try to break the boundaries of conventional animation and create the best possible animations of the medium.
- Thorough knowledge on all aspects of 3D character animation.
- The skill to pass animation knowledge on to a team.
- A strong understanding of motion, weight, emotion, acting and timing.
- The ability to take direction well.
- At least 3 years game experience. Experience on an animated television series or feature film is required.

#### Requirements of the portfolio :

- Examples of high res model texturing.
- Games models.
- Drawings and design showing a good sense of realism, atmosphere and feeling for light.

### CONTACT

Please send your full and current CV, accompanied by relevant work examples, and a portfolio to: Playlogic Game Factory, Karine De Coster, Hoge Mosten 24, 4822 NH Breda, The Netherlands or via e-mail: [kdecoster@playlogicgames.com](mailto:kdecoster@playlogicgames.com)

**WWW.PLAYLOGICGAMES.COM**





Anyone else want to tell us Italians we've got no stomach for a fight, hmmm?

# DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS

£29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Digital Reality | ETA: March 26 | [www.desertratsgame.com](http://www.desertratsgame.com)

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

A WWII strategy game set in a desert? *Martin Korda* never could resist free food

## INPERSPECTIVE

### SUDDEN STRIKE

Reviewed Issue 96, Score 86%  
Available for less than a tenner, it may be getting on a bit now, but its low system requirements and addictive gameplay still make it a worthwhile purchase.

### COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE

Reviewed Issue 124, Score 90%  
Out now on budget and also set during WWII, this squad-based, fiendishly hard strategy game is a must-have for any RTS lover.

**ONCE UPON** a time, many, many years ago (about four), a small, virtually unknown German publisher released a World War II strategy game to great critical acclaim and, almost overnight, became famous all across the land. The company was CDV, the game was the 2D RTS, *Sudden Strike*.

Despite being rendered in 3D, *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps* bears more than a passing resemblance to that strategy classic, and fledgling UK publisher Digital Jesters – incidentally comprised of several ex-CDV employees – has chosen this as one of its first releases. But will it have the same impact

for them as *Sudden Strike* did for their three-lettered counterpart? Let's find out, shall we?

## COMMANDER & CONQUEROR

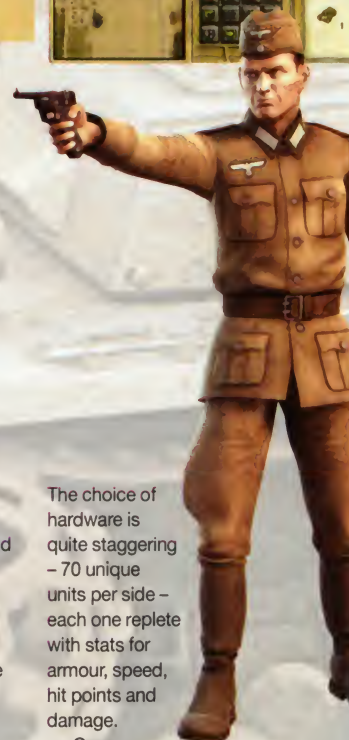
Spanning the whole of the North African conflict (1940–1943), *Desert Rats* features two ten-mission campaigns (Axis and Allies) for you to pit your wits against. Each is played from the viewpoint of a commander – either a sausage sucker or an English pigdog – who acts as a hero unit in the game as well as starring in one of the game's dual narratives. Unfortunately, the storylines make less sense than a French film noir movie about tank tops. "You what,

Korda?" Exactly. So let's not linger here too long, or on the horrifically bad voice acting, and move instead to the part that really counts. Strategy.

With no resource management, *Desert Rats* is all about battlefield tactics. Before each mission starts, you're allocated a set number of Mission Points with which to purchase troops. At first, your choices are limited to a smattering of ground units and the odd flimsy vehicle which couldn't repel a strong fart, but it's not long before the big guns become available, including a vast array of behemoth tanks, artillery and repair trucks as well as the ability to call in air strikes.

The choice of hardware is quite staggering – 70 unique units per side – each one replete with stats for armour, speed, hit points and damage.

Once you've made your choices, or simply opted for the default set-up, you're thrown straight into the action. At first blush, the levels all look identical, with their uniform, sand-covered landscapes sprawling unspectacularly across your monitor. Linger a little longer though, and you'll





## THE ART OF WAR

### COMBAT ISN'T ALL ABOUT WEIGHT OF NUMBERS YOU KNOW...

*Desert Rats* provides several tactical aces that you can call upon to gain the upper hand. Mount your hero into a vehicle for example, and it'll receive a substantial attack bonus, while loading in a scout will greatly improve a unit's line of sight.

Digging your troops in is even more useful, providing a massive defensive advantage to your tanks from the front and sides, although it does render them immobile. And remembering that heavily armoured units are most vulnerable from the rear will not only help you when planning an attack, but also aid you in preserving your own vehicles. Just remember: a little pre-planning goes a long way, and these are men's lives we're talking about here dammit!



Don't be shy, dig in!



As if it's not hot enough already.

You can also repair and steal any of the disabled and neglected vehicles you find scattered across the wasteland, giving you the choice of either diluting your existing vehicles' contingents in order to man your new armoured additions, or leaving these hulking metal skeletons scattered like corpses in the sand as you persevere with a smaller yet more efficient force.

Perform well and you'll be rewarded with Prestige Points, which give you access to special units and act as a great incentive to complete secondary missions and pre-plan your every move. Do you risk the minefields or

take a shortcut through a city where bazooka-toting enemy troops lie in ambush, ensconced in every house? Will you take the heavily defended direct route to an objective or try the long but less rigorously guarded road? Your choices are many, although some levels do smack of tunnelling in order to adhere to the throwaway storyline.

### CIRCLES IN THE SAND

So far so good then, but let me just stop you there before your exuberance



Early missions see you limited to smaller vehicle types.



"What say we call a truce and build a sandcastle, eh?"

gets out of hand, because sadly, *Desert Rats* is far from perfect. Let's start with your troops' path-finding, which is among the worst I've seen in any recent 3D RTS. Tanks and trucks sometimes go off in wrong directions or totally overshoot their markers, subsequently wading into minefields. Sometimes they simply refuse to move at all.

Wandering off on ludicrous detours, boxing each other in or driving round in circles are also fairly common complaints, and while loading troops into houses to provide them with extra cover is a great touch, unloading them can be a hazardous affair, especially when they decide to leave by the wrong exit and end up boxed in by a clump of trees.

And as if your men didn't have enough to worry about with the searing heat and the hot sand in their cracks, the poor sods' lives are made even harder by a chronic lack of optimisation. Even on a P4 2GHz machine, the game occasionally slows to an epileptic jerk, especially on the more populated levels. This kind of juddering makes

issuing orders impossible, especially when all the hotkeys suddenly and inexplicably stop working and you're left watching powerlessly as your men are ruthlessly massacred.

With a few more months of development, *Desert Rats* could easily have been Digital Jesters' *Sudden Strike*. However, with its collection of niggles, bugs and ridiculously high system requirements, the game is clearly not quite up to that standard. Despite this though, *Desert Rats* proves to be an entertaining, deeply strategic and surprisingly accessible RTS. If you've got a high-end P4 and want some desert-based strategic action, you could do a hell of a lot worse than giving these rats a home. **P4**

### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Huge selection of units
- ✓ Deep and strategic
- ✓ Superb soundtrack
- ✗ Poor path-finding
- ✗ Buggy
- ✗ Terrible storyline and acting

# 70

Entertaining, but needs a polish

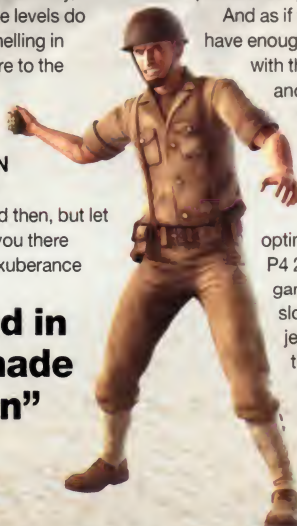
### Artillery fire is devastating against stationary units.

discover that each one is carefully crafted, challenging you with brainteasing strategic conundrums and offering you a variety of ways to tackle each obstacle. And while the visuals aren't much to talk about, the musical score is rousing and perfectly evokes the brutal warfare that's unfolding in front of you.

### PERFORMANCE VEHICLES

It's here, on the arid African battlefields, that *Desert Rats* demonstrates its considerable depth. Troops can attack specific vehicle parts such as turrets and caterpillar tracks, rendering them impotent or immobile. Trucks can tow artillery and carry troops, but are easily picked off by enemy forces. What's more, every vehicle has a set amount of posts to be manned. The more posts you fill, the more effectively that unit will perform.

**"With the searing heat and the hot sand in their cracks, the poor sods' lives are made harder by a chronic lack of optimisation"**







Somewhere to come and relax, to take stock of things.



Their tiny necks spew tiny streams of blood when their tiny heads are severed.

The heroes speak with Hollywood accents, while the plebs sound like old cockneys.

# SACRED

■ £29.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Ascaron | ETA: March 19 | [www.ascaron.com/gb](http://www.ascaron.com/gb)

**REQUIRES** PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card with DX9 support

**Steve O'Hagan's** always willing to have a stab at a hack 'n' slash RPG – even if it is fantasy by formula

## IN PERSPECTIVE

### DIABLO II

Reviewed Issue 93, Score 72%

While *Sacred* looks tons better, it borrows massively from this classic combat-heavy RPG. *Diablo II* is a little grey round the temples these days, it really cast the mould for this kind of game, and still has plenty to offer.

### THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

Reviewed Issue 116, Score 94%

Fantasy role-playing doesn't get much better than this beauty, offering a massive and open-ended world to explore, interesting characters to interact with and a storyline that's hard to drag yourself away from.

## QUALITY

versus quantity – it's a debate we've had here at ZONE many times. (Yes, we are that pathetic.) On the one hand we have those who prefer a game to offer the most intense experience possible, polished like a paratrooper's toecap, even if the damn thing can be comfortably completed in a weekend. And on the other we have those who aren't satisfied unless they've been given value

for money in the form of hour upon hour of gameplay, vast worlds to explore and massive tasks to complete.

*Sacred* comes down firmly on the quantity side of the debate. It's a combat-heavy RPG that offers a vast gameworld for you to explore and a giant's jockstrap full of quests to complete. On the surface, it's a fairly modest piece of design, taking all its cues from the hack 'n' slash genre perfected

by *Diablo* and its ilk. But what it may lack in polish, it tries to make up for in sheer scale.

## ASSAULT AND PEPPER

As sure as goblins shit in caves, your first choice, as in any formulaic fantasy RPG, is to select a character class. A little thought is well spent here, as playing through the game as the brutal, hand-to-hand specialist Gladiator is very different from

peppering folk with arrows from a distance as the Wood Elf. And there are much more unusual characters on offer here, one being the Vampiress. This (blood)lusty lady has a whole different set of skills available once night has fallen – summoning wolves, sucking life energy, that kind of thing.

Once into the world, it won't take you long to get the basics. Click the left mouse button to move, use or attack, and click the right to fire off a magic or special ability. Hotkeys can be used to switch between weapons and magic abilities, as well as to guzzle down potions.

**"Your spells invoke all manner of heavenly energies, spewing magical fire, calling down lightning and blasting winds at your foes"**





So-called optional extra quests are in fact pretty compulsory, as you don't level up enough unless you do them.



Every weapon and piece of armour you pick up changes your appearance in the game.

A quick tutorial makes sure you're up to speed with all this, and then you're on your own, off on the first leg of your many-branched quest.

True to form, the scenario is not one that will leave you confused. An evil force is threatening the world, and wouldn't you know it, only you can stop it. This generally means speaking to someone, having that someone point you in the way of someone else and heading off in search of this second someone – who will no doubt have someone else in mind for you to have a word with. You get a little bit of text at each juncture, but nothing that

would keep Tolkien up at night, and the central quest seems little more than an excuse to make sure you visit all corners of the lovingly created gameworld.

Along the way however, one of *Sacred*'s strong suits comes into play – the sheer amount of side-quests. Every other farmstead, sheltered glade or remote villa seems to have someone loitering around with a job needing doing, and while these quests are often quite banal – wander off, kill a bunch of monsters, wander back again – they do give you some sense of freedom.

*Sacred*'s take on fantasy is also nice and stereotypical, and

sure to please the average *Conan* aficionado. There are beautiful, buxom warrior maidens wearing metal thongs and suspenders. The monsters could have been copied straight out of an old D&D manual, and all your familiar goblins, orcs, trolls and dragons are in full effect.

#### SLAUGHTER HOUSE

Since almost everything revolves around you slaughtering monsters, the combat system is paramount. Aspiring to incorporate tactical nuances,

## DOUBLE TROUBLE



Combos: a bit rubbish really.

### IT'S A NICE IDEA IN THEORY, BUT THE COMBO SYSTEM IS ANYTHING BUT DEADLY

In most of the towns, villages and outlying settlements you come across, there will be a bloke dressed like Gandalf with a strange golden rune hovering above his head. This is the combo man, and for a fee he can help you combine your 'combat arts' so that a single mouse click can trigger several moves at once.

This is all well and good in theory, as a simultaneous

fire/hurricane/lightning attack seems sure to floor any opponent. But in practice, the combos aren't as useful as they sound. They take too long to regenerate and become usable again, leaving you reliant on only basic attacks for much of the time. And since your main concern in the majority of *Sacred*'s battles is the sheer number of enemies rather than the strength of one or two individuals, keeping your powers separate so they regenerate quickly is the more useful tactic, rendering the combo system a little useless.







The bigger they come, the bigger their beards grow...

*Sacred* gives you a number of weapon slots and magical power slots. By assigning different combinations of weapons and powers to each, you can easily swap from using a sword and shield to a bow, and from your lightning spell to some healing magic. The idea is that you can quickly adapt to a situation, or adopt new tactics, with a switch of weapons and abilities.

Unfortunately, this doesn't quite come off. At the end of the day, you tend to rely on your most powerful weapon and a couple of powers exclusively. And essentially, like most games in this genre, fighting is just a matter of holding down the left



The combat effects can be striking.

Your spells invoke all manner of heavenly energies, spewing magical fire, calling down lashing lightning and blasting winds at your foes. The high-res visuals manage to conjure up plenty of minuscule gore – look closely and heads are lopped off, blood

Although *Sacred* confines your viewpoint to an old-skool isometric perspective with no flexibility in angle or rotation, it manages to summon up a set of visuals that are particularly easy on the eye. The environments are insanely detailed, each with

closest level, the minutiae in the scenery remains clear.

Despite these intricate visuals and environments however, *Sacred* doesn't convince that the world you're in is in any sense alive. For 24 hours a day, the traders and blacksmiths are still standing out front, ready for business. Some of them even allow their children to play outside through the night, which we find particularly irresponsible. Enter any house, shop or even a Lord's chambers and you can rifle through any chests or boxes, nicking whatever you find and no-one will blink an eyelid. Out in the wilds, the beasts and monsters hang around in groups, like gangs of odd-looking estate kids, loitering on street corners with nothing better to do.

#### STATS ENTERTAINMENT

In their desire to pack everything with detail, the designers have also included a dazzling array of statistics; both for you, your opponents and even the items you find lying around. This may appeal to the serious number-crunchers, but when a sword has 16 or even 20 different numeric parameters,

deciding what the hell it's good for can be a tad difficult.

We've all seen what *Sacred* has to offer in the many similar games that have gone before, not least the *Diablo* titles. But that doesn't stop it from being an enjoyable, extensive fighting fantasy romp. We'd like to say that it's something akin to a *Diablo 3*, but the truth is it doesn't advance the genre anywhere near enough, rehashing it instead and serving up more of the same. But if you're hungry for a top-up of sword-swinging, this will be welcome news. **PCZ**

## "A combat-heavy RPG with a vast gameworld to explore and a giant's jockstrap full of quests"

button to slash at your foes, all the while keeping an eye on your health bar and your magical energy replenishment, ready to fire off another spell or down a healing potion when the moment is right.

Still, the game does look pretty good when the blades are flashing.

gushing from between the shoulders and limbs are severed with similarly graphic consequences. It's just a shame that these little details are somewhat lost, when you and 20 foes are crammed into an area in the centre of the screen not much bigger than your mouse cursor.

its own distinctive feel, whether it be the footprints you leave behind in the sands of the deserts, the rain that lashes down in the forests or the bats that flap about in the catacombs. And if your graphics card permits, the resolution reaches spectacular levels, meaning that even when zoomed in on the



They've put some effort into these environments, they have.

#### GOT MYSELF A WALKING, TALKING, LIVING TROLL

The main letdown in *Sacred* is how flat and lifeless the world feels, despite the gorgeously detailed high-res visuals. The townsfolk and peasants all wander around but don't actually do anything. The monsters hang out a lot, but don't seem to have homes to go to, or places to store their treasure. A little effort to make this place seem a little more lived-in would have worked wonders.

Having farmers who tend their crops as well as wander about aimlessly wouldn't have gone amiss. Having guards to stop you pillaging anything you can get your hands on, and monsters who do something other than just wander round in circles waiting for you to kill them would have helped. And having wolves and bears that don't drop the big bag of gold they've been carrying when they die wouldn't have harmed the believability cause, either.

#### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Sumptuous old-skool visuals
- ✓ Reams of quests
- ✓ Interesting character classes
- ✗ Derivative, all too familiar hack "n" slash gameplay
- ✗ Repetitive quests
- ✗ The gameworld doesn't feel alive

65

An earnest stab at a *Diablo*-style RPG





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Don't be fooled by the pretty graphics.



The Breed are ridiculously easy pickings.



The FPS sections are reminiscent of *Chrome*. Yes, it's that bad.



Lucky the Breed are robots – it makes their inane behaviour seem more natural.

# BREED

■ £34.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Brat Designs | ETA: March 19 | [www.breedgame.com](http://www.breedgame.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

**DESIRES** P4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

**It's finally here, but has it arrived too late? Anthony Holden gets to grips with a one-time *Halo*-killer**

**THE STORY** of *Breed* is a long and troubled one. We're not going to bore you with the sordid (or so we hear) details, but suffice it to say this sci-fi shooter has been in development since the

beginning of time, was looking really nice about 18 months ago, and even as little as a year back was still being touted (not unreasonably) as Britain's answer to *Halo*. Fast-forward to 2004, and *Breed* doesn't look so hot any more. Not only has the genre (large-scale vehicle-based shooting) advanced immeasurably in the past 12

months, but the game itself has been finished with all the finesse of a plane crash. Indeed, rather than being 'polished' in its final months of development, it seems to have been beaten around the head and neck with a sock full of rusty wheel nuts.

Clearly, we're disappointed. What was looking like a really classy and distinctive triple-A

title has emerged as something less than that. But rather than lamenting the wasted potential here, we're going to pick ourselves up and muster a bit of objectivity. And on that basis, *Breed* is not a total write-off.

## I CAN SEE FOR MILES

For a start, the game looks rather lovely. The proprietary Mercury engine is skewed towards rendering vast outdoor environments, and it does this with some aplomb, offering huge play-fields and a draw distance to rival *Far Cry*. You'll find island chains linked by imposing bridges, rocky canyons cut through desert hills and snow-swept tundra dotted with alien installations.

Admittedly it all looks a bit samey, but pretty nonetheless.

Similarly, the weapons, vehicles and characters are very easy on the eye. Your own USC forces favour chunky *Aliens*-inspired hardware, with exosuits, heavy assault rifles and lumbering tanks, while your robotic antagonists lean towards blue plasma effects, mosquito-like Stinger units and anti-grav craft. Clearly, there's a talented art team at work here.

The gameplay also has its strong points, not least among them sheer variety. In the brief training stages, you're

## INPERSPECTIVE

### BATTLEFIELD 1942

**Reviewed issue: 136, Score: 85%**

If it's large-scale vehicle-based action you want, and you've got access to a decent Internet connection, then this online behemoth is the surest way to go. (This, or its Vietnamese cousin, anyway.) Excellent mods such as *Desert Combat* also offer loads of long-term appeal.

### HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

**Reviewed issue: 135, Score: 84%**

Now this is the real deal. Not as awe-inspiring as when it first appeared, but still an outstanding game, with ace vehicles and addictive multiplayer options on PC.



The vehicular sections are often enjoyable but lack challenge.

**"Two years ago the Mercury engine was ahead of the curve; now it's dated"**





There's some half-arsed stealth moments that fail to excite.

taught how to command a squad of USC troops, with a rudimentary orders system and the ability to switch characters at will. This initially seems to be the default playing style, but you actually find yourself doing surprisingly little squad-based FPSing. Within the first few hours of the game, you'll face missions involving driving tanks, manning gun turrets, infiltrating bases and dogfighting in a zippy space-fighter.

#### DECREPIT

But while I could carry on listing trivial redeeming features all day, it's just dodging the issue. For no matter how pretty the game or how varied the gameplay, *Breed* is B-grade fare at best. It has an amateurish, low-budget feel throughout, not to mention some laughably poor design decisions.

Let's start with some basic technical stuff. Yes the graphics are quite nice, and two years ago the Mercury engine was looking slightly ahead of the curve; but now, it's just plain dated. Things like collision and physics are way behind today's Havok standards, resulting in clipping issues and floating corpses not seen since last century. The



Too much variety for its own good, methinks.

draw distance may be vast, but enemies still only come into view within a certain range, and often appear literally from thin air.

While such things may be partially excused, other problems can only be described as straight-out bad coding. Take the AI. To put it nicely, it's dog dirt. Just a few examples of your team-mates' incompetence include: a complete inability to use cover or even move when being fired upon; abysmal path-finding that sees them getting stuck behind every available piece of architecture when in 'follow' mode; an inability to use lifts and other devices; and a propensity to throw themselves off cliffs and drown themselves in nearby bodies of water. (Though with a game this depressing, maybe that's the best sign of intelligence you could hope for.) As for the enemy Breed, the best they

can manage is the occasional barrel roll.

#### BREEDS CONTEMPT

Worse still, the missions are simply dull. The overall storyline isn't a bad one (the alien Breed have taken over the Earth and only one orbiting battleship remains to fight back), but once again, it's all gone to waste. The missions are poorly put together, with seemingly random objectives, no sense of tension or pace, and zero reward for completion. The vast environments are rarely put to good use, and though the experience is somewhat saved by the vehicles, it's hardly enough to justify the trouble.

There's also a complete lack

## THE BIG QUESTION

### BUT, YOU CRY, WHAT ABOUT THE MULTIPLAYER?

*Breed*'s online potential was always a huge part of its appeal. The possibility of a 'Battlefield 2042' type of game, with vehicles, bases and huge, tactically rich maps was all too apparent, but sadly it hasn't materialised. Instead, what we've got is a hastily knocked together deathmatch with the barest of options and eight uninspiring maps.

Bizarrely, all the interesting, objective-based modes have been stripped out, including the promised CTF, Assault and other custom modes. What you're left with is vanilla DM, Team DM and Team DM Melee, all equally pointless and desperately unsuited to the sprawling maps. And that's if you can even get the thing to run, as *Breed* has some of the most unstable network code we've seen in years. There was only one server up at the time of review, but even on a LAN, the game is beset by drop-outs, crashes and much swearing. Just buy *UT2004* instead and be done with it.



The maps are way too big for a decent deathmatch.

of characters in which to take an interest. Aside from a couple of weak protagonists later on, you're stuck solely with your CO, an archetypal battle-scarred veteran whose job is to read out mission objectives in a ridiculously over-egged military growl. In short, he's a cock.

This brings us to probably my favourite thing about *Breed* – the diabolical voice-acting. I'm not kidding here. It honestly sounds like the developers have blown their sound budget on hookers and got some mates from down the pub to have a go instead. My favourite has to be the Scottish heavy

gunner, whose unconvincing highland burr yields such gems as: "Help us oot mun, I need more ammo." Any remnant of credibility *Breed* still possessed goes rapidly out the window at this point.

I could go on. I could mention the clumsy 'my first synthesiser' musical score, the many glaring bugs, the lack of squad tactics – but we've only got so many pages.

Obviously, *Breed* is a huge disappointment. It's not the worst game in the world, but it is a frustrating and flawed game that will only reward the most forgiving of players. And as much as it pains us to say this after all the expectation, *Halo*-beater it is not. **[X2]**

#### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Diverse arcade action
- ✓ Huge, detailed environments
- ✗ Abysmal AI
- ✗ Laughable voice-acting
- ✗ Vast maps not put to good use
- ✗ Amateurish, low-budget feel throughout

# 55

Hugely disappointing – more suicide mission than *Halo*-killer



# CONAN

■ £29.99 | Pub: TDK Mediactive | Dev: Cauldron  
| ETA: April 8 | [www.conangame.com](http://www.conangame.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

**DESIRES** P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Michael Filby strips to the waist and dons a pair of hairy pants. Spot of luck he was reviewing *Conan* at the time...**



Looks like they got the point. Ahem.

**GOOD** old Arnie – not only was he perfectly suited to the role of the Terminator back in the '80s, he was also born to play the role of Conan; a large, monosyllabic meathead, whose idea of a conversation is twatting someone around the face with the business end of his sword.

Alas, there's no sign of Arnie here, as Slovakian developer Cauldron (of *Chaser* fame) has based the *Conan* game on the original pulp novels. Fortunately, this hasn't stopped it from snapping up the sizzingly atmospheric movie soundtrack by Basil Poledouris. However, when a licensed soundtrack is a game's notable highlight, you know you're in trouble.

## SIMPLY BARBARIC

The rather protracted intro to *Conan*, which like all the cut-scenes is handled by the in-game engine, tells the story of

## INPERSPECTIVE

### PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 84%

Less hack 'n' slash, but far more finesse – the prince is a far nimbler hero than the lumbering Cimmerian.

### LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

Reviewed Issue 139, Score 79%

If you prefer your medieval pain-dealing to be more ethereal, Raziel and co offer a darker brand of puzzling and fighting.



The hula hoop competition proved a hit at the retirement home.

Conan the Cimmerian hunting down the cult responsible for razing his village and murdering his uncle. What this amounts to is some third-person hack 'n' slash action, mixed in with puzzles of the 'find a switch and run back through the level' variety. So far, so mundane.

What's worse, any visceral enjoyment to be had by smacking your way through the missions is stamped on by the unfriendly interface and buggy dynamics. Conan frequently gets stuck on bits of ground, jumping is awkward and requires pixel-perfect precision, and pushing the climb button more often results in him dancing around the bottom of a ladder instead of getting on the damn thing. The useless camera does you no favours when in combat or attempting to jump chasms either, and the clunky controls only add to the frustration.



One of the few levels featuring daylight.



"Come on – stand up and fight!"



"Tonight Matthew, I'm going to be He-Man."

But hang on, maybe this is all saved by some great AI? Er, no. With IQ about on a par with Conan himself, bad guys generally stand rooted to the spot until you're within range, at which point they'll run straight at you. The graphics are about three years out of date, and come complete with invisible barriers that are curiously very visible. Character animation is little better – the manner in which Conan runs strongly suggests he keeps the sheath for his sword somewhere very uncomfortable...

However, the salt in *Conan's* axe wound has to be the save system. Like the early *Tomb Raider* games, it requires you to find crystals for every quicksave you

use, which in this day and age is simply unforgivable.

## MY GOD, IT'S HUGE!

If, though, by some miracle you can get past all these errors, there is a pretty hefty game to be found in *Conan*, with countless levels and an almost stupidly large repertoire of combos to learn. Some dubious replay value is

also offered by the mystical Atlantean sword, which can be unlocked for your second play-through by collecting a few ancient artefacts. However, it's all so repetitive and banal the first time that you'll probably rather drink the sweat strained from Conan's thong than subject yourself to it all over again. **PCZ**

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent music
- ✓ Hours of gameplay
- ✗ Dated graphics
- ✗ Tedious and repetitive levels
- ✗ Puzzles fail to engage
- ✗ Buggy, buggy, buggy

# 45

Big and dumb, but not much fun





# POOL PARADISE



■ £19.99 | Pub: Ignition Entertainment | Dev: Awesome Studios |  
ETA: April 2 | [www.awesomestudios.com](http://www.awesomestudios.com)

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Sea, sunshine, balls galore and big sticks. This is the stuff that *Dave Woods*' dreams are made of...**



Seb Rah. Geddit? Seb Rah! Hahahahaha...



You get a few sub-games thrown in for free as well.

**LONG-TIME** readers of *PC ZONE* will know that drinking makes you better at playing PC games. In a wholly scientific feature, we proved that you enter 'the zone' between two and six pints, leaving it shortly thereafter despite your brain refusing to acknowledge the fact.

The exact same curve can be used to describe pool. Get down the pub sober and you'll play like a clueless twat. Get on the beer and the balls start shooting down the pockets quicker than Dwain Chambers after a double-drop. The perfect excuse, then, to review a game while drinking...

## PRACTICE MAKES...

Double-act Archer Maclean and Jimmy White have collaborated on pool games before to great effect, but what can you really

add to the mix when you've already perfected the physics? In this case a tropical island and a load of people ready to take you for all you've got at a variety of different games like 9-ball, killer and straight UK pool. So, not a lot then...

Saying that though, *Pool Paradise* plays a pretty good game, with mouse-driven cueing bringing you as close to the real thing as possible. Earn yourself some cash by taking part in tournaments and spot challenges, and you can buy new baizes and cues or sample various sub-games like darts and coconut shy. Don't expect to spend any more than about 12 seconds on each, but they're free so I'm not going to whine.

## IMPERFECT

Actually that's a lie – the bitch-slapping starts here. First off, who designed the graphics? I could have done better and I can't draw. Sub-primary school scrawls of characters with names like Kent Be Serious and Don Pushme have no place in a pool game – pool is cool, or at least it should be. Playing on a make-believe island and having to dive under water to borrow money off the loan shark (geddit?) is bad enough, but when the developers can't even



Get the no. 6 down the volcano and I'll give you a tenner.

## "Who designed the graphics? I could have done better and I can't even draw..."

muster up the cash to draw a decent resemblance of Jimmy White, the celeb endorsement, you have to worry.

Other in-offs include the lack of a free cam (which makes it hard to line up certain shots) and

the lack of a pointer showing which ball you're supposed to be playing next in a sequential game. What's more, the dialogue box covers the screen after a foul break, rendering it impossible to decide whether

Minor points, admittedly, but annoying ones nonetheless.

Then there's the dodgy AI that produces identical breaks if you play the same character again, and super-aggressive play from the big boys with not even a nod to a safety game. All of which adds up to a rushed and amateurish job, albeit one that's surprisingly addictive. Happy? Right, I'm off down the pub. **PCZ**



Whose face is on the dollar bill? No, he wouldn't, would he?

## INPERSPECTIVE

### WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 78%  
Snooker's a game for people who don't drink as much, but if it's your cup of tea, this is the best big table simulation you can buy.

### PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 90%  
Pool's a laugh but there's only one true sport – and this is the very best version on any platform.

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Good spread of pool variants
- ✓ Decent approximation of pool
- ✗ Poor AI
- ✗ Terrible presentation
- ✗ Still not as good as the real thing

# 65

Shabby but lovable, like Jimmy White





A tense fight against four demons, but unfortunately, it looks like poo.



Send your Death Knight in while you hang back.

# BEYOND DIVINITY

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters |  
Dev: Larian Studios | ETA: April 9  
[www.beyonddivinity.com](http://www.beyonddivinity.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card  
**DESIRES** P4 1.7GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

**Let the smiting commence! Richie Shoemaker digs out his funny dice and dives into this immense RPG sequel**

**BLIZZARD** and BioWare: towering colossi that breathlessly support the mighty weight of the fantasy genre. So immovable are they that no fantasy RPG developer dare try to surpass them. Instead, young pretenders tend to borrow and

imitate, marrying the action-oriented gameplay of Blizzard with the sprawling depth of BioWare, hoping some of the magic will rub off.

In the case of Belgian developer Larian and its 2002 effort *Divine Divinity*, it actually worked. With its sprawling, detailed gameworld and spectacular real-time combat, *Div Div* rose above its inane moniker to become one of the most playable RPGs of the year. And in a genre that's increasingly fleeing to the massively multiplayer dreamland, it was a hugely welcome surprise.

With a small but vocal cult following keenly baying for more, it was only a matter of time before we saw a follow-up. *Beyond Divinity* is that game, but Larian is keen to stress that it's neither sequel nor expansion pack, but simply a continuation of the saga. There's a new setting and fresh characters, but otherwise it's the same heady



Death Knight goes to work on some old bones.

fusion of deep background detail, dynamic character advancement and frantic mouse-clicking.

## OPPOSITES ATTRACT

The story carries on from the original, with you once more taking charge of the Chosen One in his continuing battle against the Lord Of Chaos. This time, however, you don't start off battered and bruised in a quaint village, but emaciated and imprisoned in another dimension, your soul bound to the fortunes of an evil Templar. He's fallen foul of the same demon that's taken a dislike to you, a situation neither you nor your Death Knight chum are particularly chuffed about. Basically, if one of you cops a

fatal blow, the other buys it too.

This state of affairs is perhaps the most interesting feature of *Beyond Divinity*, and the one that distinguishes it most clearly from its predecessor. Previously, your only playable character was a sickeningly righteous teacher's pet type, and the addition of a malevolent warrior makes for a much more interesting story. In fact, it's essentially a fantasy take on the Hollywood buddy movie, as both characters bond through shared danger, earn the grudging respect of the other and end up slapping each other's butt-cheeks in a steamy changing room. Of

## INPERSPECTIVE

### DIVINE DIVINITY

**Reviewed Issue 121, Score 85%**  
Save for a gob of spit and polish, there isn't much to choose between this and its successor. For the sake of continuity however, we'd suggest you start at the beginning with *Div Div*, especially if you can find it in your local game store bargain bin.

### KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

**Reviewed Issue 137, Score 94%**  
The level of interaction and world detail doesn't come anywhere near that of either of the *Divinity* games, but for story, dialogue, characters and all-round looks (and a great *Star Wars* setting), this is the best RPG you can buy.





Could it conceivably be any more beardy if it tried?



Pressing the ALT key highlights any pick-ups on screen.

course, since the game takes considerably longer to plough through than the entire *Lethal Weapon* series, the premise is dragged out far longer than is necessary; but it makes a nice change from your usual party of drab off-the-shelf adventurers.

#### RANDOM DUNGEON

Aside from the new story and the eventual ability to dally between various dimensions as you strive to master the 'lost art of riftrunning', the gameplay remains fundamentally unchanged. The most obvious

difference is that with two characters to control, there's more scope to explore the bewildering number of skills, both old and new. The Death Knight is a natural 'tank' character and an obvious candidate to take the warrior role, leaving your divine other free to follow the way of the Wizard or thief-like Survivor. But this being *Divinity*, the dynamics of the skill system make your choice of class largely irrelevant, as any class can pursue pretty much any skill path. Together with the (albeit expensive) option to unlearn

skills, this lends the game unrivalled scope to experiment.

In some ways, this open character system actually hindered the replayability of the first title, but here the developer has made amends with the new Battlefields system. Basically, this allows you to take your avatars away from the main campaign into a series of random dungeons. Here, you can gain experience and

As with its predecessor, *Beyond Divinity* stands above its peers in offering an excellent level of optional detail, both in terms of background material and interactivity. You can read the various texts found lying about on bookshelves, or make use of innocuous items like pots, rotten food and plant life.

Moreover, there's a subtle yet powerful system whereby you can unintentionally upset the

The fact is that of all the fantasy games out there, there are none that are as accessible as this series, while still offering such huge scope to explore the environment, the story and the characters themselves. The graphics are decidedly old-skool and the combat isn't nearly as tactical or as spectacular as the developer claims (I feel Larian should drop the *Diablo*-style combat entirely). However, with BioWare moving ever more mainstream, the *Divinity* series could well take over from where *Baldur's Gate* left off.

There's still some way to go until that happens, but *Beyond Divinity* definitely shows Larian Studios progressing (very) slowly in the right direction. Bring on *Divinity 2*. [A-]

### "Of all the fantasy games out there, there are none that are as accessible as this series"

equipment to bring back to the main quest. It's a great way to release tension when you're struggling to locate some elusive key or other, and because the whole game is based around alternative dimensions, it doesn't feel like a cheat's way out either.

various NPCs just by ending a conversion prematurely, the result being that their aid is offered at a higher price. If you shut them up a number of times, they may even blank you from then on. It's a nice touch that adds some degree of believability to the game world.

## VISUALLY CHALLENGED



Zoom in for enhanced crud-o-vision.

#### GRAPHICAL ENHANCEMENTS HAVE ONLY MUDDIED THE ISSUE

Despite a small graphical makeover, *Beyond Divinity* retains a few hangover issues from the first game. The skewed isometric view makes a return of course, which is not something that bothers us particularly. What we do take issue with is the battles, which are perhaps even more messy than before. As swarms of enemy creatures heap themselves upon you, the only way to make out what's going on is often to look at the health bars. Of course, the various spell effects have been beefed up and the characters are now built from 3D models rather than 2D sprites, but in combat the animations are just as repetitive as before. And even though the new option of being able to zoom in on the action is welcome, what you get is a big ugly mess filling up the screen instead of a little one in the corner.

#### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Staggering depth and detail
- ✓ Engaging new characters and story
- ✓ Impressive skill system
- ✓ New Battlefields system offers a welcome break
- ✗ Messy combat and disappointing 3D models
- ✗ Similar to the first game

# 71

Old-skool goblin-bothering fun





Zoom in and take a better look at the action.



Some levels take place in underground dungeons. Which is a first.

# KNIGHTSHIFT

■ £29.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Reality Pump |  
ETA: April 9 | [www.knightshift.com](http://www.knightshift.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card with T&L support  
**DESIRES** PIII 733, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Martin Korda played this RPG/RTS all night.**  
**You could say he was working the nightshift.**  
**Geddit? I'll get my coat...**

**ONE OF** these days, all games will have decent voice-acting. At least, they will if I ever become president. Forget famine and peacekeeping: decent in-game line delivery would be top of my agenda, 9am, Monday morning.

Of course, by then it'd be too late for *KnightShift*, an RTS/RPG hybrid blighted by one of the worst scripts and some of the most risible acting performances you're ever likely to witness. Lines such as, "Hast thou also had problems with pesky wolves and mangy bears?" are hard enough to take seriously at the best of times. But when they're woodenly delivered by hideously untalented thespians, it's almost impossible not to laugh out loud. Apparently *KnightShift* is supposed to be funny, but we reckon it gets the laughs for all the wrong reasons.

## INPERSPECTIVE

### WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%  
Now this is more like it. A lesson in how to do the RTS/RPG genre right (although admittedly, on a £10,000,000 budget), WC3 features a superb, well-acted storyline and hugely compelling gameplay.

**MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR**  
Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%  
Simply the best strategy game ever made, it's now available for just £25 and comes bundled with the ace *Viking Invasion* expansion pack.



Floyd, you said you didn't have any skeletons in your closet...

So much for the comedy. As for the gameplay, it's basically a mixture of role-playing and RTS in the *Warcraft III* mould. True to cliché, the plot concerns the efforts of one Prince John (that's you), trying to overthrow an evil necromancer and reclaim his throne and bride-to-be. Aiding you is a priest who looks like a bearded Concorde nose-cone in a cloak, and your fearsomely-named sidekick Floyd.

### CALCIUM-RICH

*KnightShift* is divided into two distinct parts – base-building RTS missions and task-led RPG levels. The strategy parts are by far the more enjoyable, keeping things simple with just one resource to collect and a smattering of buildings to

construct. And the single resource? No, it's not wood or coal or spice – it's milk, ha ha! (The developers are Polish and that's Polish humour, apparently.)

The battles themselves are somewhat random affairs, with clumsy unit selection hampering your ability to use any kind of tactics. On a more positive note, though, enemies do turn and run away – or rather hobble – when close to death, and troops gain in experience the more action they see.

The RPG missions are somewhat of a disaster, proving even more basic than their strategy counterparts. Running around a level like a hyperactive baboon, you're tasked with completing unimaginative tasks such as finding weapons, items

or lost children, while fending off any would-be attackers. Only there's no need to do the latter, as you can simply outrun them. Even if they're wolves.

### TRY HARDER

It's a real shame that more thought and effort wasn't put into *KnightShift*, as the engine isn't half bad, while the gameplay is fairly accessible and perfect for any RTS/RPG newcomer. What's more, the music is very nicely done, sucking you into the mythical gameworld and morphing almost seamlessly from one tune to the next to reflect what's happening on your monitor.

As it is though, *KnightShift* can only be described as a pauper's *Warcraft III*, and unless

you're new to gaming, or have a penchant for comically bad acting, we'd suggest looking elsewhere for your fantasy-world thrills. And no, we're not talking about the lingerie section of the latest M&S catalogue... **PCZ**

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Decent engine
- ✓ Great music
- ✓ Easy to pick up
- ✗ Worst script and acting ever!
- ✗ Fiddly interface
- ✗ Poor RPG sections

# 54

Who's laughing now?





The release version has no save feature, but a patch should now be available.



Murder, extortion, stocktaking.



The mean streets are surprisingly quiet...



The heavy metal audio track is an acquired taste.

# GANGLAND

■ £29.99 | Pub: Whiptail Interactive | Dev: MediaMobsters | ETA: Out Now | [www.mediamobsters.com](http://www.mediamobsters.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card (64MB for multiplayer)  
**DESIRES** P4 1.1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

**Bada-bing bada-boom. *Richie Shoemaker* finds himself in the family way in this criminal strategy effort**

**EVEN** the finest games can be underwhelming for the first few levels – having to tread the opening levels of a first-person shooter armed with only a pistol for example, or attempting to dominate an RTS battlefield with only standard issue GIs on hand.

*Gangland* is no exception, in that it's remarkably dull at the outset. The difference is, it doesn't ramp things up gradually with new weapons and better gameplay options. In fact, the game shows no real sign of improvement until the gameplay undergoes a complete shift,

when you stop following orders and start giving them.

Until this happens, *Gangland* is little more than a mundane tribute to *Syndicate Wars*. You recruit a couple of heavies, buy a Tommy gun and then it's off to rub out a bent copper or some two-bit crime lord – a deed that will earn your mobster respect, cash and experience points. Yet whatever the target, the mechanics of each mission are the same: group select your hoods, click on the enemy and wait until one or other group

ends up as slivers of Parma ham. To break the monotony you do get the chance to forcibly bring local businesses under the protection of your Don (which is mildly rewarding), but this is offset by some atrocious driving missions that deserve a gangland-style execution.

## KINGPIN

Thankfully, a few hours in, you find yourself with an office, a couple of hoods and an empire to build. The combat remains unsophisticated and seemingly

random, but instead of having to focus on one target, you have an expanding network of bars, shops and restaurants that rely on you for protection – and you on them for income. Placement of baseball bat-wielding brutes and pistol-packing assassins suddenly becomes important, as losing ownership of a gun shop means you not only lose money, but the enemy can fortify it and re-arm there. The fact that only your central character can 'negotiate' with local businesses also adds a tactical layer.

In the end however, despite the pretensions of being a glorious RTS/RPG hybrid, *Gangland* has more the feel of an overburdened arcade shooter. Predictable AI patterns and basic combat let down the action, and the role-playing is buried so deep it hardly seems to matter. It's only when the business side of the game opens up that the game hints at what could have been, but even then the linear storyline (despite being quite good) holds back what sense of freedom there is.

Worse still, the city in the game just doesn't feel alive. There are plenty of pedestrians milling about, but it's only the enemy and the police that you can meaningfully interact with. There are no cars to speak of on the roads – hardly indicative of a thriving underworld. Clearly the developers have gone to considerable effort to make *Gangland* stand out, but sadly the concept works better than the reality. **C+**

## INPERSPECTIVE

### GTA: VICE CITY

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%

About the most fun you can have breaking the law without ending up in the choko – unless of course you stole your copy.

### GANGSTERS 2

Reviewed Issue 105, Score 55%

The original game offered plenty of depth and freedom but was hampered by a steep learning curve. The sequel was much easier, but lacked the strategic depth. Still, they're both on budget now if you're interested.



"Can't we just take a cab?"

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Plenty of fast-paced action keeps things moving
- ✓ Enjoyable strategy moments
- ✓ Solid storyline
- ✗ Crude combat
- ✗ Abysmal driving sections
- ✗ Limited and unsophisticated control interface

# 59

Adequatefellas



# AGAINST ROME

■ £29.99 | Pub: Bigben Interactive | Dev: Interactive Arts | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card

**They came, they saw, they commanded and conquered.**

**Richie Shoemaker practises his Italian...**

**WHO WOULD** you rather lead into battle? An arrow-straight rank of drilled centurions, their javelins piercing

the heavens, or a horde of sweaty barbarians with bushy beards and body odour? As the name of its latest RTS suggests,

the developer of *Against Rome* is hoping you choose the latter.

Previously responsible for the WWII stinker *WarCommander*,



**When battles get this big you wish you had a zoom option.**



**Win battles and get glory points to spend on new tactical or building options. Hoorah!**

Interactive Arts has gone a fair way to making amends with this more traditional RTS. The single-player campaign enables you to command either the Celts, Goths or Hun as they bicker and fight with each other before setting out to bring down the Roman Empire. While you can command Roman troops in a couple of separate historical missions, their inclusion is little more than a bit-part.

What sets the game apart from the likes of *Age Of Empires* is the streamlined resource management. Rather than creating dozens of peasants to scour the land for wood, food and stone, resources are gathered from within your settlement. For food, build an

abattoir, staff it and the food stacks up – the same goes for woodcutters' huts and mines. Resources are infinite too, which means you're free to concentrate on combat.

Unfortunately, the battles are messy affairs, with units often getting lost in the melée and little in the way of finesse. Touches like the Chieftain unit add some RPG flavour and depth to the game, but it's the game's ordinariness more than anything that comes to the fore as the campaign wears on. Shame, really.

**PCZONE  
VERDICT**

**64**

**Total War it ain't**

# YU-GI-OH! POWER OF CHAOS: KAIBA THE REVENGE

■ £24.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: KCEJ | ETA: March 26

**REQUIRES** PII 450, 128MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 650, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card

**Read 'em and weep: Richie Shoemaker's got a royal flush**

**I QUITE LIKE** *Yu-Gi-Oh!* That is to say, I've watched the TV show a few times, on one occasion to the bitter end. It's

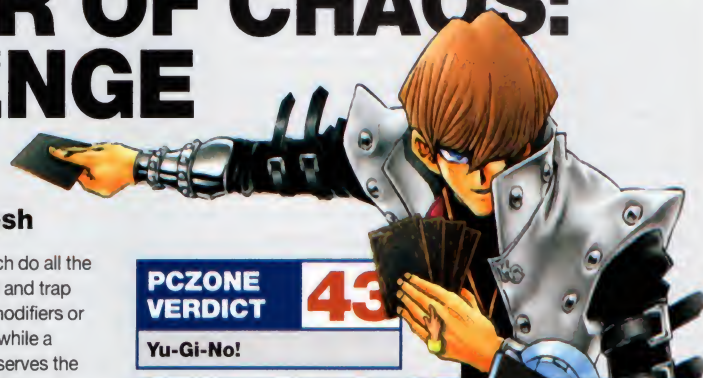
passable kids entertainment – not in the same league as *Angry Beavers* perhaps – but more than watchable when cradling a cup of tea and a hangover. Which is more than can be said for *Beyblade*.

Not that I'm an expert in such shows, but having mentioned my Saturday morning viewing habits to the team at *PC ZONE*, it appears I have unwittingly been designated its official 'card combat' specialist. It could be worse, believe me.

*The Revenge* is actually the second title in the fledgling PC series, and like the previous *Yu-Gi-Oh! The Destiny*, it plays an authentic game of what can only be described as Top Trumps meets conkers. The idea is to take hit points off your foe by playing

monster cards, which do all the damage, while spell and trap cards add various modifiers or switches. This title, while a standalone, mainly serves the purpose of adding 300 new cards and a range of new combos to the game. It works fine as these things go, and the basic graphics and interface do the job adequately.

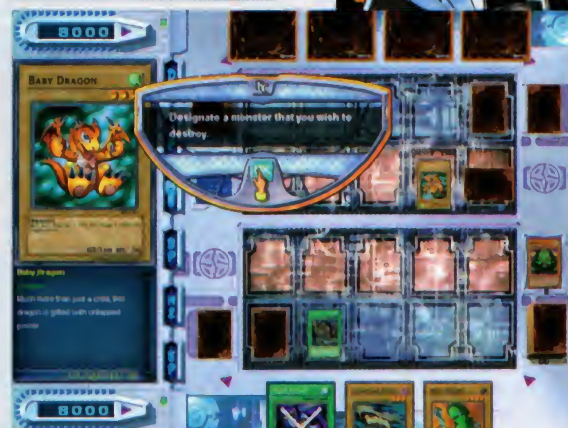
Needless to say, the kids will love it, but for most it'll probably just add up to impenetrable rubbish. If there were a decent multiplayer mode it would perhaps be more worthwhile, but sadly there isn't even a shit one. And since the AI opponent spouts the same dialogue over and over, the whole game gets tiresome very quickly.



**PCZONE  
VERDICT**

**43**

**Yu-Gi-No!**



**May we suggest Magic: The Gathering Online instead?**



**There are 300 new cards on offer, but sadly no multiplayer option.**





You don't see that in the Premiership.



Yeah, we can all do that.

# URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Acclaim | Dev: Gusto Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Steve Hill gets away with violent conduct and bad behaviour**

**WHO SAYS** games aren't realistic? Until a couple of years ago, myself and a bunch of other media no-marks used to play in a weekly Thursday night kick-about under London's famous Westway flyover. The opposition was provided by a bunch of local yooof affectionately

known as Athletico Street Urchins, whose incessant tricks and flicks would often prove more than a match for our cynical brand of late-tackling grit. However, one sweaty evening after one tackle too many, their gangly central midfielder pulled a knife from his

sock and promptly threatened to carve our man to ribbons. Suffice it to say, that was the last match we played.

Amazingly, the spirit of those matches is recreated in *Urban Freestyle Soccer*, comprising four-on-four no-holds-barred matches in a series of bleak

inner city locales. And while you can't wave a blade at your opponent, you can kick him in the windpipe, smack him on the head or throw a tyre at him.

An unlikely mix of football, wrestling and extreme sport, it shouldn't work and often it doesn't. Not because the idea is rank, but because the game is somewhat crippled by rogue AI and aberrant physics.

Which is a shame, because when it's behaving it can be

quite entertaining, with goals flowing freely and simple combos providing unlikely gymnastics. Throw in judicious use of punk rock, hip-hop and foul language and the ingredients are there for a vaguely playable mid-price game. But £30 for a load of bugs is taking the piss.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **54**  
Non-sensible soccer

# STARSCAPE

■ \$24.99 (£14) from [www.moonpod.com](http://www.moonpod.com) | Dev: Moonpod | Pub: Moonpod | ETA: Out Now

**IT'S ONE THING** to remake a classic game, quite another to reinvent it. *Starscape*, taking inspiration from the 1979 coin-op classic *Asteroids*, tries to do just that and the end result offers significantly more than a new lick of paint.

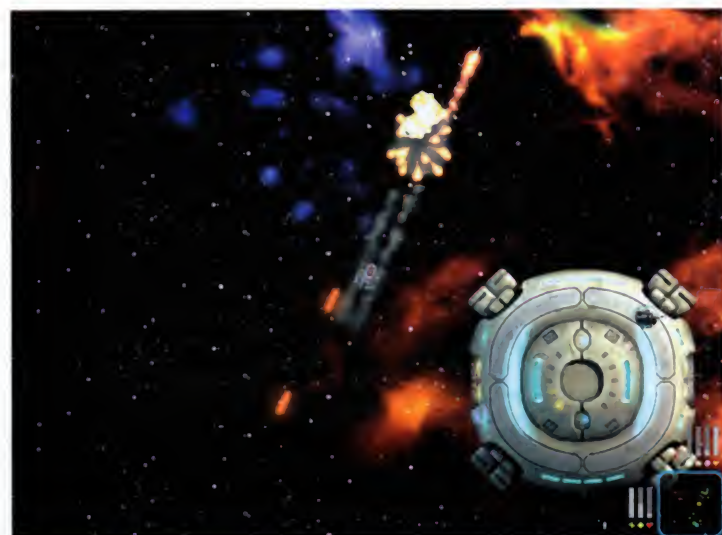
Rather than a single wraparound screen, *Starscape* features dozens of scrolling maps linked by jump nodes. Your mission is to fly to a node, shoot the 'roids and suck up the crystals left floating behind, before taking the minerals back to the mothership. The more minerals you

collect, the more equipment you can build to upgrade your ship.

While the resource management is a well executed bolt-on, the 2D combat is the mainstay of the game and as new ships and weapons are 'researched', the game gets increasingly frenzied. Add in an enjoyably camp and stylish storyline and the resultant remix is addictive and thoroughly fresh.

Richie Shoemaker

**PCZONE VERDICT** **79**



It's a big ol' place, space.



Right bloody mess, that.

# ALIEN SHOOTER

■ £11 from [www.sigma-team.net](http://www.sigma-team.net) | Dev: Team Sigma | Pub: Team Sigma | ETA: Out Now

**ENEMIES** with trillions of polygons are all very nice, but sometimes you just want trillions of enemies coming at you instead – and of course, a high velocity chaingun with which to mow them all down. Step forward *Alien Shooter*, which in the absence of any empirical studies, I'm happy to stake has a higher body count than all the *Dooms*, *Dukes* and *Gauntlets* put together.

It's also a bloody good game with an arsenal of weapons any FPS would be proud of. Dual pistols, the obligatory

shotgun, a flamethrower and a rocket launcher are available for purchase between each level as you fight to keep the unending waves of aliens at bay.

You may think the game looks a bit old-hat, but I can assure you the gameplay is anything but. Sadly, what the game does lack is a multiplayer mode – but for this price, *Alien Shooter* is excellent value even without it.

Richie Shoemaker

**PCZONE VERDICT** **76**



# UNIVERSAL COMBAT

■ £19.99 | Pub: Dreamcatcher | Dev: 3000AD Productions | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Paul Presley sounds the alert as another derelict battlecruiser limps into orbit**

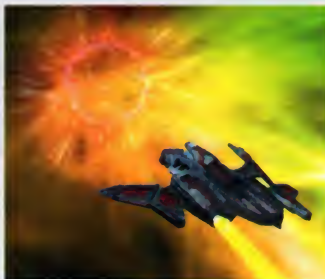
**WORDS** fail me in trying to describe this latest entry in the *Battlecruiser* 'canon', so I'm going to try noises instead. 'Gaaaarrrrrggghhhh!' Unfortunately, I can't pad out a whole review with guttural cries wrenched from the bosom of despair, so I'd better return to English. Hold on while I look up 'excrement' in the thesaurus...

Since *Universal Combat* merely seems to be the same game as the last one, just with (slightly) updated graphics and a more stable engine, I should just point you towards the review I wrote then and get on with my life (*Battlecruiser Millennium*, issue 112, 45 per cent).

However, if you're new to the party that'd be unfair, so a brief recap is in order. *UC* attempts to



"Been around the world and I, I, I..."



Looks can be deceiving.



PlanetSide must be trembling in its boots.



A battlecruiser in space. Yesterday.

be your total package space sim, offering everything you could possibly want to do in space. Command a fleet of cruisers, fly a fighter craft, land on planets, fight on foot, in tanks, at sea and trade throughout the galaxy. Whatever, *UC* supports it.

It just doesn't support it with any degree of competence, that's all. There's no aspect of the game that isn't abysmally

implemented. I would dearly, dearly love to sit here and go on for five or six pages listing the faults, but it really isn't worth the effort. Just avoid *UC* like you would a diseased badger or rancid tramp.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **22**  
Not so smart

# CASTLE STRIKE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Phoenix Global Software | Dev: Related Design | ETA: March 19

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Martin Korda crosses the picket line to get his hands on this hit-and-miss RTS**



Castle Strike's siege weapons are many and varied.

**DESPITE** Germany's love of strategy games, they're not renowned for their ability to make them. *Castle Strike* is a prime example, boasting excellent features and demerits in equal measure.

Set in medieval times, this 3D RTS casts you as one Thorwald Rabenhorst, a young hero who must overthrow his family's arch-enemy and comedy beard-sporting Alrich von Drachenfels.

At first glance, there seems to be more than enough here to entice even the most jaded of strategy-lovers. The 3D engine generates lush, believable worlds, while the fully zoomable and rotating camera means you can appreciate them from all angles. You can construct awesome castles, lay siege to enemy strongholds with catapults, trebuchets and cannons, and use the terrain to gain a strategic

edge. Certain weapons offer huge advantages when used against specific troops and you can even line your archers on castle walls.

Sounds perfect? Sadly, no. *Castle Strike* simply doesn't satisfy nearly as much as it promises to. The camera has a tendency to misbehave, leaving your troops obscured by mountains during battles and your workers hidden behind city walls. What's more, the linearity of the missions negates much of the game's strategic subtlety, while selecting troops is clumsy. And don't even get me started on the painfully inept and inadequate formation settings.

*Castle Strike* may have the heart of a great 3D RTS, but its failings render it frustrating. There's no shortage of ambition here, but with the likes of *Warrior Kings* around, this comes a very distant second.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **66**  
Ambitious, flawed and very German



The 3D engine is excellent. Shame about the camera.





# THE ENTENTE

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Lesta | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PII 266, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a 56k modem

**Richie Shoemaker learns of the horrors of war in this mud-caked RTS**



It doesn't say so here, but this smacks of the three-year-old Cossacks engine.



Looks like Buckingham Palace.



It's all very green, isn't it?



Someone's left the chip pan on.

some ignored Napoleonic conflict.

Leaving aside such limp regard for authenticity, the game's features are worryingly amateurish. Everything from the AI to the interface to the laughably inappropriate resource system is basic. Admittedly, there are thousands of troops to command, but controlling them is a nightmare and the whole experience is best forgotten.

**PCZONE VERDICT**

**39**

Give your money to  
The British Legion instead

**TAKE A** look at these screenshots and guess which war *The Entente* is based on. It's not that easy, considering the game looks almost identical to *Cossacks*, but if you've an eye for history, you'll have spotted the biplanes flitting across the battlefield. Yes, it's *The Great War*, a war that brings to mind waterlogged trenches, mustard gas and bungling generals. Not the happiest period of human history, but in gaming terms a conflict too long ignored, especially when you look at the glut of games set in and around WWII.

Sadly, while *The Entente* had potential to capture WWI's senseless slaughter, the gameplay is average at best. In fact, the game is totally derivative of every other RTS that's come before it, with only the merest lip service paid to the tactics and technology of the time.

For instance, there are no trenches to speak of, which is a bit odd to say the least – a bit like having a WWII game without Germans. Instead, you create a huge column of troops and march them off across the map. If it wasn't for the drab fatigues and the odd rhomboid tank, you'd swear you were fighting in

# MARCH! OFFWORLD RECON

■ £19.99 | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: HBM | ETA: Out Now



A bargain basement version of the LithTech engine shows its age here.

**UNIDENTIFIED** structures are appearing on Mars, and it's up to your team to find out what's going on. As it turns out, some renegade robots have taken over the old Earth colony and are more than happy to put an end to your investigation. OK, so it's hardly the most original of backdrops, but we've never let that get in the way of a good shooter.

But of course, *Offworld Recon* is not a good shooter. 'Utter shite' would be a

better summation of its qualities, with bland, featureless graphics backed up by atrocious gameplay in which laughably-conceived droids set about you with oversized egg-beaters. Were it not for the fact that the game costs 20 sovs, it would almost be funny. But it's not.

Richie Shoemaker

**PCZONE VERDICT**

**15**



Sacre bleu! A French point-and-click adventure that's actually pretty good.



# JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH

■ £19.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Frogwares | ETA: Out Now

**THE JULES** Verne 'classic' is the inspiration rather than the blueprint for this old-school adventure, though you could just as easily supplant Lewis Carroll in the role of progenitor, as our plucky heroine falls down a hole into a bizarre world from which she must eventually escape.

As point-and-click adventures go (and it isn't very often that they do, these days) *JCE* is a decent enough game for fans of the genre. Despite its classic roots, the story feels fresh and modern (if a touch forced) and there are plenty of puzzles

ranging from vexing to vacuous.

Where the game loses ground, though, is with the characters – none of which possess the depth of character that a 'serious' adventure game requires. As such, the game often feels dry and gnawingly one-dimensional, especially if you've been reared on the Lucasfilm classics of yore. Then again, with *Sam & Max 2* off the agenda, true adventure fans can't be too choosy these days.

Richie Shoemaker

**PCZONE VERDICT**

**63**





# FEEDBACK

**Will Porter** puts his dainty fingers into the vast bath of gaming opinion, and finds the waters run both hot and cold. And tepid...



Giant pigs are a largely untapped resource in PC gaming.

## IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to [letters@pczone.co.uk](mailto:letters@pczone.co.uk) with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

### X2: THE THREAT

REVIEWED ISSUE 138 (BY PAUL PRESLEY), SCORE: 92%

#### What we thought

Satisfaction on a great big gaming plate, decorated with gameplay garnishings and covered with game design sauce. The best space game ever.

#### What you said

X2: *The Threat* is a game of immense proportions. Having barely scratched the surface of what's available, I've spent over 12 hours exploring the picturesque universe that's been lovingly created by the Egosoft team. The game itself can be pitched at various levels: you can spend a short five minutes causing trouble in a remote system, or spend a lifetime developing a complete pirate network. I think your review was fair as it raised all the important factors of the game, but I'd strongly recommend players to



**Armed And Dangerous: Dad's Army-funny or The Office-funny?**

try it out for themselves to really get a feel for it.

Stuart Yeates

I thought X2 was confusing, with not enough effort put in to make it easy for beginners. It was all menus and meaningless gameplay. There wasn't any guidance on the story missions either, and I spent ages trying to find the right system – and failed. Plus, the cut-scenes were dreadful to the point of unplayability. However, on a plus point I have sold it and made a bit of profit too – so it was good in that respect.

RichieHell

#### Prezzer's comment:

The thing I realised quite early on about X2 is that it's only for clever people. I remember thinking much the same thing about the menus the first time

I saw them, but it was only after I decided to push a few of the buttons, move the mouse and try, you know, *interacting* with the game that I found there's nothing complicated about them at all. As for the cut-scenes, well, I did warn you. The bottom line is: you're wrong and I'm right. Useful to remember that, I find.

### BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

REVIEWED ISSUE 138 (BY KEITH PULLIN), SCORE: 89%

#### What we thought

A brilliantly-crafted piece of emotionally riveting storytelling and all-round gameplay excellence.

#### What you said

I thought *Beyond Good & Evil* was a fantastic game; a great mix of stealth, action, diversity and humour. The times you're

left running away from everything, explosions and lasers firing, are some of the most heart-thumping moments I've ever played: the stealth just works brilliantly. I also love how you can use your camera to complete objectives and earn cash along the way. Taking pictures of wildlife provides one of the many cool distractions

#### What you said

I bought *Armed And Dangerous* today and I'm pretty impressed. I like a bit of mindless action after a hard day's work and it certainly seems to fit the bill. Some of the jokes misfire, I'll admit, but it's still had me giggling to myself loads of times. It's not the best thing I've ever played, but I still think it's money well spent.

Ben Hennessy

## "I adore BG&E – it's exciting and wonderfully strange"

### KID-KANG LIKES A LAUGH

and you feel a great sense of achievement after you capture a rare creature on film. Let's not forget that funky music either...

LC\_Recoil

I adore *Beyond Good & Evil*. We haven't had any games like it in ages: French, beautiful, exciting and wonderfully strange. It's like *Little Big Adventure* never went away.

Kid-Kang

#### Keith's comment:

I couldn't agree with you more. *BG&E* is one of the most stylish, exciting and enjoyable action games ever made. It's just a shame that it didn't receive the acclaim it deserved after hitting the shelves at the same time as EA's big Christmas licenses.

### ARMED AND DANGEROUS

REVIEWED ISSUE 139 (BY STEVE O'HAGAN), SCORE: 77%

#### What we thought

A simple, undemanding and fast-paced shooter that veers from the gently amusing to a whole lot of fun. The gags, however, wear pretty thin.

*Armed And Dangerous* is a bloody funny game, with lots of sheep and hilarious moments. It's fun too, and a welcome change from the dearth of decent PC games on offer of late. However, the review was by a moody Welshman from the Valleys: devoid of a sense of humour, with a bitterness in his mouth left only by a swig of something nasty. Or the jilted love of a fluffy sheep. It should have scored better.

Jason\_6780

#### Steve's comment:

OK mate, you may have a point: I am a dour Celt who's more cynical than a room full of chronic pessimists who've just found out that the pyramid investment scheme they've invested their life savings in was a mafia-run con. But keep your bestiality-based bigotry to yourself, you daft racist. I agree that some may indeed find *Armed And Dangerous* funnier than I did, but it's still a throwaway blaster that's fun while it lasts – which sadly isn't very long. [X]



**X2: A beautiful triumph or an annoying fiddle-fest?**



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# SUPERTEST: THIRD-PERSON SHOOTERS



## THE CONTENDERS



**STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT  
- JEDI ACADEMY**  
ISSUE 133, SCORE 89%



**HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2**  
ISSUE 136, SCORE 88%



**MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL  
OF MAX PAYNE**  
ISSUE 136, SCORE 93%



**MAFIA**  
ISSUE 119, SCORE 92%



**GRAND THEFT AUTO:  
VICE CITY**  
ISSUE 131, SCORE 95%

## THE JURY



**DAVE  
'TALLY HO'  
WOODS**



**ANTHONY  
'DIGGER'  
HOLDEN**



**MARTIN  
'MIAMI'  
KORDA**



**PAUL  
'FINGERS'  
PRESLEY**



**WILL  
'NOTHING TO LOSE'  
PORTER**



**SUZY  
'DARKSIDE'  
WALLACE**

**It's back! Better than ever! Martin Korda rounds up the PC ZONE team as they step out of their bodies to find the reigning king of third-person shooters**

**THIRD-PERSON** shooters have enjoyed something of a boom of late. It's a genre generally considered to be more at home on consoles, but the last 12 months have seen the PC not only improve on the console's finest – such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series – but also add several brilliant titles of its own to the genre, including *Mafia* and *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, as well as top saber 'em up *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*.

With the PC's superior graphics and control system (we all know the perils of aiming without mouse look), it's little wonder that it's showing the way forward for the genre. But which of the current third-person behemoths is top dog?

To solve this and other age-old questions, PC ZONE has assembled six of its finest gaming minds to engage in a furious beer-fuelled debate, putting five top shooters through a probing even Barrymore would think twice about. The results, gentle reader, are nothing short of slightly unpredictable...



## JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

**Anthony:** I don't think it's really a shooter as such, more a third-person action game. Anyone who's playing it as a shooter has missed the point, because it's all about the lightsaber. That's the beauty of this game compared to the previous games in the series – they've accepted that it's primarily a third-person lightsaber action game. All the other weapons are pretty much the same as they used to be, but the lightsaber combat and Force powers have been improved beyond recognition.

**Suzy:** It's just a button-masher! Although to be honest, I'm not really a *Star Wars* fan...

**Will:** In that case shut up. (Everyone laughs.)

**Suzy:** It makes you think

lightsaber combat is all about control and finesse, but really all you end up doing is hammering the mouse buttons.

**Paul:** I never felt like I had any control of the lightsaber either.

**Dave:** I agree with Prez. And Anthony. Oh, and Suzy because I'm not a *Star Wars* fan either. I

## "What pissed me off was the way the so-called Jedi masters kept falling off ledges"

MARTIN KORDA IS UNIMPRESSED WITH JEDI ACADEMY

wanted a shooter and I got a third-person game in FPS clothing. I just don't think the engine's up to the job. If you want third-person, you need a third-person engine.

**Will:** But the more you play it, the

more it becomes second nature.

I was a lot better at knowing when to strike and when to use certain moves by the end.

**Martin:** It's like any combat game. When you start, you can just hammer away at the controls, but once you get the hang of it there are actually some

great moves you can use to get through your opponent's guard.

**Will:** The fact that there are so many people having duels online shows there's more to it than just randomly hitting buttons.

**Dave:** And that's just something I didn't get at all. I played it in multiplayer and it just made me angry.

**Anthony:** There is an element of button-mashing involved, but if you want to take the time to investigate the control system further, you can get a lot more

Jedi Academy's bosses really raised our rancour (ha ha).



out of it. You also learn how to use the lightsaber in

combination with the Force powers. I think it's a fun control system, though certainly not a perfect one.

**Martin:** It's really satisfying being able to deflect shots.

**Anthony:** Yeah, but that's all automated.

**Will:** In hindsight, there weren't enough advances over *Jedi Outcast* in the game.

**Anthony:** That's exactly why I didn't give it a Classic.

**Martin:** I think it's a game where you can learn a lot from the AI. They use combos, know when to use which Force power, know how to disarm you and when you watch them doing all of this, it makes you want to become better at the game yourself.

**Anthony:** But there's no way you can ever do what they do, as it takes so many buttons to mix and match Force powers.

**Martin:** What pissed me off was the way these so-called Jedi masters kept falling off ledges and off the sides of mountains.

**Dave:** That was my favourite bit. Jedi masters? Pah!

**Anthony:** Ah, but if you pay attention to the plot, you'll find most of the enemies are just common thugs who've been imbued with Force powers.

**Martin:** Even so, even an idiot wouldn't fall off a ledge. A child could do better.

**Anthony:** Well, I didn't notice that many enemies falling off ledges.

**Will:** The end bosses are shit.

**Martin:** How about the story?

**Anthony:** Functional at best.

**Will:** Tacked on. Now we've got *Knights Of The Old Republic*, which is a lot more balanced in terms of good and evil than this. *Jedi Academy* is a case of you either going this way or that way, good or evil – which is OK, but it's not quite enough.

**Anthony:** You're right. *Jedi Academy* isn't really in the same league as *KOTOR*. But it's still great fun to play.

## HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

**Martin:** I think it's totally different from the rest of the games here. It's slow-paced, plus you've got to be tactical and patient and inch your way across the levels. You can't afford to simply jump into the action and start shooting people like a madman, which can be infuriating to start with. However, if you take the time to master it, *H&D2* can be more rewarding than any of these other games.

**Dave:** It's weird: it plays the same way as the first did, but I

don't think the developers achieved the same sort of atmosphere. Maybe it was just because the first game was so new...

**Paul:** I think the developer made the squad control interface worse than the first game. It seems unnecessarily complicated to me.

**Suzy:** It's definitely hard, but I like the way you can control multiple characters. Your squad AI is so good that they tend to take out hostiles before you've even seen them though.

**Paul:** Till you learn the squad commands like 'Hold Fire', it can feel like the game's just playing itself.

**Will:** I think it's got a real 'boy's own' feel to it.

**Anthony:** Boyzone? What, the band? (Everyone laughs.)

**Martin:** I always had you down as more of a Blue fan myself Will.

**Will:** No, no, no, you know what I mean. It's like having your own little toy soldiers.

**Anthony:** Why is it third-person then, rather than a *Raven Shield* first-person style?

**Paul:** There is a first-person mode, though it's designed to be played in third-person.

**Anthony:** What I mean is, have they used the third-person view well enough?

**Martin:** In third-person, it's the hardest out of all of these games to aim properly. But it does grow on you – provided you have the patience and time. Only having one save game slot doesn't help much either.

**Suzy:** The one real problem I had with it was the buttons: there's just too many of them and they're all over the place. You have to spend half an hour just assigning keys before you start, because the default setup





H&D2 may be complex, but it's also extremely rewarding.

is just too confusing.

**Martin:** Because the game's so complex, you'd expect the interface to be much more intuitive than it is.

**Dave:** That's something you get used to. It takes a bit of time, but I found it fairly easy to pick up.

**Anthony:** Anything that doesn't default to standard WASD in this day and age can go to hell.

**Dave:** You're a WASD fascist. I still play games with the arrow keys, although I appreciate that makes me a bit of a simpleton.

**Paul:** The interface is much worse than its predecessor's, but the game is much better, with far fewer bugs.

**Dave:** You think? I definitely prefer the first one. If you had the same levels with the new engine, I think it would win hands down.

**Martin:** I didn't find my squad's AI particularly helpful, as sometimes they do exactly the opposite of what you say, even when you've patched the game. When they do follow your instructions though, it's probably the most rewarding game here.

#### GTA: VICE CITY

**Paul:** I've never heard Martin laugh so much while playing a game.

**Martin:** It's great, I love it.

**Dave:** I defy anyone to not have fun while playing this game. It might be a bit samey, but it's one of the best ways I can think of to spend a weekend. Apart from making love to a beautiful woman of course.

**Suzu:** If I was stuck on a desert island and could only take one game, it would be *Vice City*. Even once you've finished all the missions, it's infinitely playable. It's got some great moments of humour in it too.

**Martin:** This is the one game that successfully melds proper structure, a storyline and a freeform element. The rest of the games here are all pretty linear by comparison.

**Anthony:** I think it's brilliant too. The *GTA* games are in a class of their own. They're the funniest games around and the most successful at blending freeform and mission-led gameplay.

**Paul:** I don't like the visuals – I find them really basic.

**Dave:** They may be a bit basic,

but if you think of the size of the city and the fact that it's a PS2 game as well as a PC game, I think they're as good as you can expect.

**Martin:** I think they add to the humour too. If they were more realistic, like *Mafia*'s, I don't think the random acts of violence would be as funny.

**Will:** The vehicles are ridiculously good fun to drive – the game's just perfect in my eyes. The cars are great, visuals are great and it's funny. Even before you start playing, you can decide what you want to do. So if you want to kill a prostitute, you can.

**Dave:** Will! What happened to 'I'm a good boy really'? Your mum was in the office the other day – if I'd heard you say that before, I'd have had a quiet word with her...

**Martin:** I do think it's a bit too easy to get chased by the police – there are just so many of them,

it's hard to break any laws without having some cop chasing after you.

**Anthony:** It's good that they chase you when you've committed a crime, but I agree that it's a little too easy to break the law without even trying. It'd

**"The vehicles are ridiculously good fun to drive – the game's just perfect in my eyes"**

**WILL PORTER LOVES A BIT OF VICE CITY**

be good if they chased you just as much, but you had more ways of evading them.

**Dave:** Learning where the stars are isn't the best way. It's really hard to outrun or lose them and if you get more than a couple of stars, it's impossible.

**Paul:** It annoyed me that the developer didn't add more features for the PC version, more things to interact with and some

multiplayer options.

**Dave:** It's probably a demand from Sony.

**Anthony:** They did add mouse look, which makes a difference. As a third-person shooter, it's much easier to play on the PC than on a console.

**Will:** And the weapons are brilliant too.

**Martin:** Really? I found them a bit unsatisfying. They're not a patch on *Max Payne 2*.

**Will:** That's because *Max Payne*'s a gritty game and this one's tongue-in-cheek.

**Dave:** And when you do get the powerful weapons, you really feel like you've got something in your hands.



*Vice City*'s driving sections are a joy to behold.



"And if this club ever runs out of golf balls again..."





**Mafia's driving sections are far less forgiving than Vice City's.**



**Gritty, dark and captivating. That's Mafia in a nutshell.**

**Anthony:** I found *GTA3* got boring once I got to the second island, but *Vice City* has tried to solve that problem by letting you buy property – and of course you always want to fill up your garage with new cars. But there does come a time when you feel like you've seen and done everything in the game.

**Will:** I never feel like that.

**Suzy:** Yeah, I still play *Vice City* now – there's always something that surprises me and makes me laugh.

## MAFIA

**Dave:** A flawed classic. I loved it because it was an adult game, it didn't patronise me and the story was pretty good. Let's face it, everyone wants to be a gangster – it's why I moved to Brixton. The actual game isn't up with the rest of the contenders here, but I think that's more down to the limitations of the PC. Don't get me wrong: I think it's brilliant, but it's not perfect.

**Martin:** I love this game, but I hated the beginning where you had to ferry loads of nondescript people around the city.

**Paul:** The game's trying to tell a story, which is why it starts so slowly.

**Dave:** And you've got to start somewhere. You can't expect to knock off one of the top men straight away – it just wouldn't happen, would it?

**Martin:** But there's no storyline in those first few taxi missions. And to make matters worse,

unlike *Vice City* it's really unforgiving. So if you bump into a lamppost and accidentally injure your passenger, you have to start the whole thing again.

**Anthony:** *GTA* without the fun.

**Paul:** To be fair, it's trying to be more realistic than *Vice City*. Once you get really into the story, it's amazing.

**Martin:** Long term, I think *Mafia* is the better game. It's not instantly gratifying, but once you get into it, you see that the storyline is superb, the acting is brilliant and the period is perfectly captured. I love the

small touches too, like running over a telephone box so that a nearby policeman can't ring up the police station and report a crime you've committed. I thought the fire-fights were also better than *Vice City*'s – more realistic and satisfying.

**Paul:** But it's a very unforgiving game, with very few save points. It can be very frustrating when you get to the end of a mission and then die.

**Will:** Every part of the game fits in perfectly and it's incredibly realistic. It may be very linear, but it's also very well designed.

**Paul:** I only played *GTA* for a few days, and to be honest, I couldn't be bothered to go back to it. However, with *Mafia* I wanted to find out what happened, so I played it all the way to the end.

**Suzy:** I liked it, but I hated having to constantly re-do levels every time I died.

**Martin:** It's a bit like *Vice City* meets *Hidden & Dangerous* in that sense. Same developer too, as it happens.

**Suzy:** I found the AI quite dumb.

**Martin:** Really? I thought it was superb, probably the best out of all of these games.

**Suzy:** Yeah, but you can shoot some enemies and they just stand there while you kill them.

**Martin:** Maybe they like being shot at...

**Will:** I think the driving sections are inferior to those in *Vice City* – quite often you feel that you're driving around for no real reason. Plus, it also feels like most of the driving sections aren't integral to the game, but are just ways of linking one mission to the next.

**Dave:** The shootouts are definitely the best bit of the game – I'd even say they're the best in all of the third-person games. Apart from *Max Payne 2* of course.

## MAX PAYNE 2

**Dave:** I've probably told you this before, but bear with me. I reviewed the game, and had to play it on a Sunday, feeling distinctly unwell and not in the mood at all. Within half an hour I was absolutely hooked and it was a massive effort to put it down for something to eat. I finished it in a day, but what a day it was!

**Will:** I've finished it three-and-a-half times! It's absolutely brilliant. You feel like every room has had so much time, effort and money poured into it. The new physics definitely improve on the original model.

**Paul:** Physics are the new lens flare though. If I see one more body being flung across the room in a supposedly realistic fashion, I'll...

**Will:** Rubbish. We threw that dead body off that skyscraper ten times and you giggled like a little girl.

**Anthony:** You're wrong Presley! We're not just talking about ragdoll deaths here. Are you seriously saying that physics engines are the new lens flare?

**Paul:** No, I'm saying physics engines are dead.

**Anthony:** Physics are dead?!

**Paul:** Yep, ragdoll physics are



**Arguably the best-looking game ever.**



dead. I'm fed up with seeing dead bodies flung around rooms. I want there to be a bit more refinement. Like here, it's like each bullet is some kind of trampoline and sends bodies flying round the room.

**Dave:** There's an argument that pre-rendered animations give you more control and that some people prefer that to real-life physics, but they're obviously wrong. I can't even begin to tell you how much I'm into real-life physics in games – and the fact is that whether you like it or not, it's here to stay.

**Anthony:** I have to agree with Dave. It's absolutely brilliant and the physics add loads to the gameplay. It's not just about how people react when they've been shot, but how everything reacts

also works really well because it helps create a more colourful character that you can identify with, rather than the hero just being 'you'. *Max Payne 2* does this better than any of the other games here.

**Will:** Hear, hear.

**Dave:** I agree: *Max Payne* is the best third-person game ever. I'm not normally a fan, but this game blew me away. Anyone that says 'it's too short, it only lasts seven hours, etc, etc' should give up games for good.

**Paul:** It's also the most cinematic game here.

**Will:** Yeah, you can even listen in to him making phone calls. It's just brilliant the way his character comes across, like when he calls the porn line and starts shouting: "Killing them all

## "Ragdoll physics are dead. I'm fed up with seeing dead bodies flung around the room"

PAUL PRESLEY HANKERS AFTER THE GOOD OLD DAYS

and all the chain reactions that are set off as a result. It may not be realistic in the boring Paul Presley sense, but it's realistic enough to make it immersive.

**Martin:** The very nature of third-person games is surely to make the whole experience as realistic and visually impressive as you possibly can?

**Anthony:** There are several reasons why you need a third-person perspective. With *Max Payne 2*, you need it because bullet-time wouldn't work in first-person. You want to see all the spectacular acrobatics and seeing that from inside someone's head just doesn't work. It also makes it easier to control other aspects of the game, like driving in *Vice City* and *Mafia*. In *Max Payne 2*, it

only made it worse. They're all dead! THEY'RE ALL DEAD!" Will starts banging his hands on the table, getting more and more animated.

**Martin:** Calm down Porter, it's just a game.

**Will:** They're all dead! (Porter finally calms down after being restrained and strapped to his chair.)

**Martin:** I do find *Max Payne* an incredibly clichéd character though, I have to say.

**Dave:** That's not the point!

**Anthony:** Exactly. It's not just a cliché – it's taking clichés and making fun of them. It's ironic, it's self-referential and it takes the piss out of the whole B-grade cop genre.

**Will:** I agree. Can someone untie me now please? [X]

## AND THE WINNER IS... GTA: VICE CITY



With so many classic games in the running, the voting couldn't have been closer.

WITH THE AVERAGE REVIEW SCORE ACROSS OUR CONTENDERS BEING A WHOPPING 92 PER CENT, THE FINAL VERDICT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE A CLOSE-RUN THING – BUT LITTLE DID WE KNOW JUST HOW CLOSE...

For Suzy, *Vice City* was the clear winner. "It's the most humorous and enjoyable game I've ever played," shrieked our excitable disc editor when pressed to name her favourite. Paul was rather more restrained, shunning *Vice City* for the darker, grittier *Mafia*. "It grabbed me the most and it's the only one I just had to play all the way through. I love its realism."

Seeing an upset on the cards, Martin chimed in with his vote for *Mafia* too, claiming: "While the slow start pissed me right off, what came after was simply incredible. *Mafia* has a stunning script and acting, great action sequences and perfect characterisation too."

But just as *Max Payne 2* looked out of the running, Anthony pulled it back in. "*Max Payne 2*'s my winner!" he bellowed challengingly. "It's so

beautifully made, amazing to look at and the sort of game you want to play over and over again."

Dave couldn't agree more. "Everyone was a bit surprised when I gave it such a high score, but play it and you'll see why. It's the most fun I've had on a PC for years and I want *Max Payne 3* now!"

So, with the votes balanced between *Max Payne 2*, *Mafia* and *Vice City*, the deciding vote came down to Will, surely a dead-cert to vote for *Max Payne 2*. Pulses raced, sweat started to bead and then the son of a sheep farmer shocked us all. "Controversially, I'm going to pick *Vice City* as my winner. I adore the fact that it's freeform – you can do whatever you like and there's always something new to discover." So with *Payne*'s fate sealed, it was *Vice City* that stole top spot by a solitary point.

## BUT WHAT DO YOU THINK?

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN

In an all-new Supertest feature, we've decided to give YOU a part in the discussion, letting you have your say on the PC ZONE forums about which game is best. If you'd like to take part next month, just log on to register your vote.

This month, after some intense voting, your decision was the same as ours. As one reader, **RaTang** stated: "The great voice-acting and freedom makes *Vice City* a highly replayable game." **G\_Man\_007**'s decision wasn't quite so clear-cut: "*Mafia* is a pearl of excellence, but not perhaps the best of the bunch. So which is it? *Vice City* or *Max Payne 2*? I'll say *Vice City*," he stuttered unsurely. Well, there's nothing like being decisive, is there?

*Mafia* too received an avalanche of support, not least from gangsta-lovin' **Talmoor\_h**. "*Mafia* brought with it the feeling of the '30s period – the true 'gangster' feel," he hollered, while **Darrenmdr** backed him up by saying: "*Mafia* has some of the most cinematic gameplay I've ever experienced. It's not perfect, but it's as close to the great gangster films as a game can get, and a great advert for what a decent PC game should be."

*Max Payne 2*, although shunted into third, received more than its fair share of praise too. For **Davetsutton**, as for many others, it was the

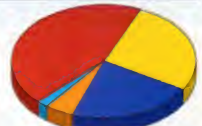


Your winner by a mile, *GTA: Vice City*.

"awesome story" and "cool bullet-time effects" which did it for him, but it was **Coolbromk** who gave us greatest cause for concern with his reason: "Because Max doesn't look like he has a cucumber shoved up his arse." That's a relief.

### READER VOTES

■ **GTA: VICE CITY** .....44%  
■ **MAFIA** .....27%  
■ **MAX PAYNE 2** .....22%  
■ **H&D2** .....5%  
■ **JEDI ACADEMY** .....2%



## OUR VERDICT

### THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

JURY	WINNER (2PTS)	RUNNER UP (1PT)
PAUL	MAFIA	H&D2
ANTHONY	MAX PAYNE 2	VICE CITY
WILL	VICE CITY	MAX PAYNE 2
DAVE	MAX PAYNE 2	VICE CITY
MARTIN	MAFIA	VICE CITY
SUZY	VICE CITY	MAX PAYNE 2

POSITION	GAME	POINTS
1ST	GTA: VICE CITY	7
2ND	MAX PAYNE 2	6
3RD	MAFIA	4
4TH	H&D2	1
5TH	JEDI ACADEMY	0

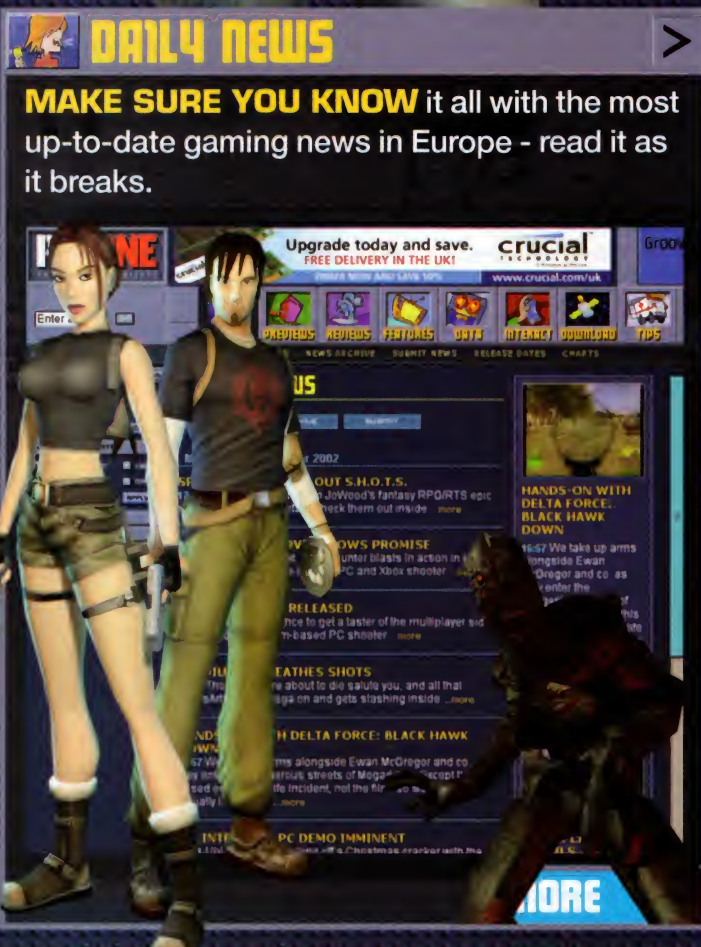


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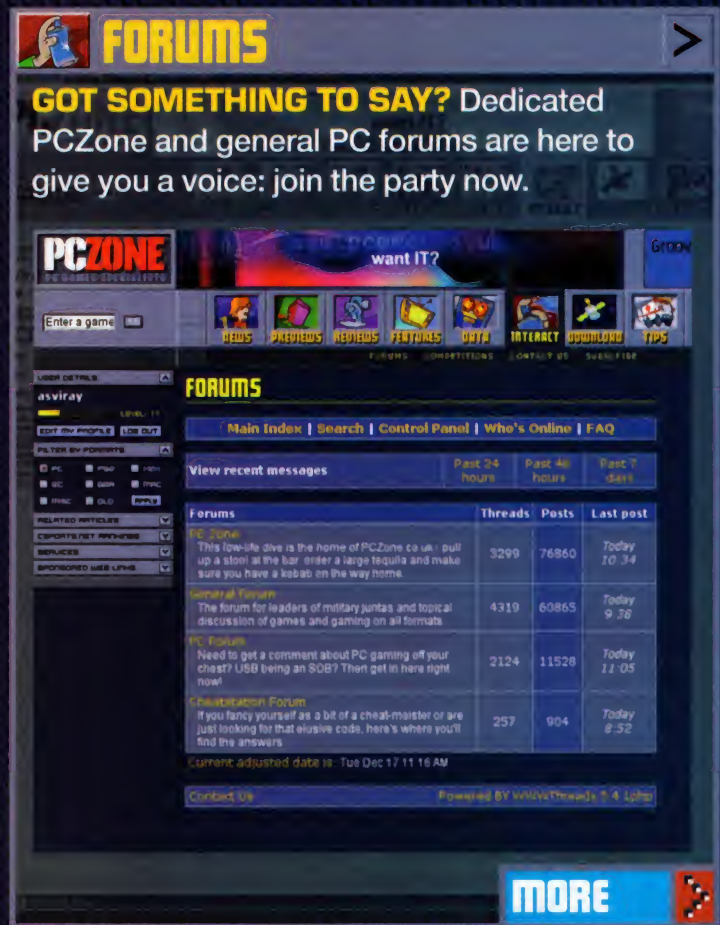
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PC Forum	2124	11528	Today 11:05
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THE FIRST CHOICE FOR PC GAMERS



# YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

# ONLINE ZONE

## HAVE IT OUR WAY



■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ A quick tour of my virtual workspace. I have replaced the cumbersome, some say unfashionable, Windows Taskbar with the more fetching ObjectDock menu bar ([www.stardock.com](http://www.stardock.com)). Now I have a desktop free of clutter and easier to use than an impressionable teenager adrift in the big city for the first time.

Windows Media Player is now a neglected redheaded stepchild to my copy of iTunes For Windows ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)), and my email software is free of the Outlook Express restraints thanks to LiSA ([www.speakingassistant.com](http://www.speakingassistant.com)), a wonderful tool that alerts me to each new e-missive with a personalised vocal announcement: "You have mail from a friend, a colleague, your wife, Satan etc."

Customisation, that's where it's at, baby. I enjoy my desktop much more now I have shaped it towards my own personal peccadilloes. What I would now like is for my massively multiplayer experiences to allow the same. Too often, developers of such beasts focus too narrowly on the concept of 'game', rather than seeing that what they're actually creating are gaming 'operating systems'. So why should we not customise these systems as we do our desktops? Allow third-party utilities to run within them. Let enterprising designers create their own GUIs should we desire. Don't worry, we're not changing the game. Your precious artistic gaming statement will remain unchallenged.

Finally this month, I must give a special 'shout out' to the men, women and others of the 58th Marine Corps 'Wildcards' outfit on the PlanetSide Werner server, for their invaluable aid and assistance in this month's NeverQuest. A finer bunch of soldiers I've yet to see. Expect no mercy!

## ALIENS INVADE IN

EXCLUSIVE SHOTS FROM THE NEW EXPANSION!



Although still in development, the aliens have an H R Giger feel to them.



**WITH LAST YEAR'S** *Shadowlands* expansion pack helping to keep Euro sci-fi MMOG *Anarchy Online* firmly among the US big hitters, Norwegian-based developer Funcom is making sure that 2004 sees just as much activity, keeping the game fresh and exciting for veterans and newbies alike.

*Alien Invasion* is the latest expansion pack to hit the world of Rubi-ka and, while

not as epic in scope as the ground-breaking *Shadowlands* pack, Funcom's game director, Marius Enge, is keen to point out that it's in no way less important to the overall experience that *AO* provides.

"With *Alien Invasion*, we wanted to make a sci-fi orientated expansion with an emphasis on social aspects in addition to fast and furious gameplay," he explained in

an interview with *PC ZONE*. "We're targeting both hardcore and casual players. That's the main objectives of this pack. The initial reactions from our community definitely show that we've made some good decisions."

Quite what the goals of the pack's titular invaders are is yet to be revealed and, most likely, won't become apparent until long after their presence is felt across the whole gaming world. What will be more readily obvious is what the aliens are bringing to the party.

"I believe that the new alien presence will up the ante considerably when it comes to the action part of *AO*," Enge says. "Not only

**"The alien presence means new and exciting combat options and paves the way for new technology and powers"**

MARIUS ENGE GAME DIRECTOR, FUNCOM



The world of Rubi-ka is about to be forever altered by the new race.





**96 THE SAGA OF RYZOM**  
Mother Nature in a MMOG



**98 CITY OF HEROES**  
Fighting the good fight online



**102 BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM**  
The BF1942 sequel reviewed



**110 GETTING STARTED**  
Setting up your own LAN party

# ANARCHY ONLINE



The motherships will be playable areas.

does the alien presence mean new and exciting combat options, it also paves the way for new technology and powers. Interestingly enough, how the story develops will depend on the feedback we receive from the players. We do have a set storyline for the cause of the invasion, but how it evolves say, six months after launch, is something we can't predict right now since the reactions and playing patterns of the player base will have a large influence."

To help Rubi-karians prepare for coming invaders, the AI pack will also bring some much anticipated social enhancements to the game. Player and organisation housing

and headquarters are to be added, along with the option to band together to form whole towns. "Almost all of the feedback so far has been very, very positive," reveals Enge. "Even though some players were expecting a social-only expansion, I believe we have given them something more. Since AO is a game centred around combat, I think it would have been a mistake to not include new combat elements in an expansion. We found the invasion to be a perfect addition to an already involving

combat experience. In addition, we also added lots of new social elements, so I think the players will get the best of both worlds."

Other additions come in the shape of the more usual expansion pack goodies, from new vehicles, weapons, armour and clothing to a whole raft of new quests. What won't be changing is the social make-up of Rubi-ka's factions. At least not intentionally.

"We do of course control a lot of central elements of Rubi-ka's life," says Enge.

"However, we're not going to force a truce on

the players to deal with the aliens, nor will we force them to maintain the

bloody conflict if they have other plans. This is one of the truly interesting aspects of running a dynamically evolving virtual world, and as always, the players must find the best way of doing things for themselves."

No official date has been set for AI as yet, but we'll be taking a closer look at it over the next few issues.

## WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



**TENTEN**  
(HOMEPAGE3.NIFTY.COM/PUZZLEHOUSE)

Decimalisation has a lot to answer for. You knew where you were with pounds, shillings and pence, but nowadays, thanks to the bloody EU (and the Romans), it's anybody's guess as to how much a cup of industrial strength latte costs. Bring back bartering I say. Anyway, something else you can lay firmly at the feet of deca-based numerology are the lost hours I've had since *TenTen* came into my life.

Based in Japan – but don't let an inability to tell one Kanji from another distract you – *TenTen* is just one small corner of a larger puzzle-based gaming website. But while the majority of the offerings will require reading skills (or reservoirs of intuition and common sense that are forever beyond my ken), this addictive little beastie is as simple to get to grips with as the seminal puzzler that was *Tetris*.

You need the almost superhuman power of being able to combine single digits into a total of ten. And you need to do it at speed since the little blighters are forever plummeting downwards. As with *Tetris*, should the stack at the bottom reach the top of the screen... Owari. (Show-off – Ed.)

Sounds stupidly easy, doesn't it? But, quick, without thinking, in the next two seconds, does 2+1+2+2+1 equal seven or nine? Wrong, neither, but that's just a fraction of how fast you have to think once you hit the higher levels. Plus, you have to be thinking about the next combo at the same time. For a numeral dyslexic such as myself, it's scary as hell.

Maths: the universal language.



## COMPETITION

# WIN TRIALS OF ATLANTIS

FIVE COPIES OF THE COLLECTORS' EDITION PACK UP FOR GRABS

As the medieval MMOG *Dark Age Of Camelot* undergoes its radical facelift and expands seawards, we've teamed up with the generous bods over at Mythic Entertainment to bring you a stonking prize giveaway!

The TOA Collectors' Edition comes complete with the full DAOC client, both add-on packs (*Shrouded Isles* and *TOA*), a kit for creating medieval wax

seals, an exclusive brass pendant and a bonus CD full of extra goodies. Plus, you get a full month's subscription to the game. All in all, it's worth around 80 of your British, er, euros.

To win one of the five packs, simply answer the following question:

**Where is the fabled lost city of Atlantis supposedly to be found?**

- A: In the sky
- B: Under the sea
- C: Junction 25 on the M6

Send your answer before April 29 to: *Trials Of Atlantis* Competition, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.





## DEVELOPER DIARY



### DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters



Coming soon to a modem near you.

When I started this column ten months ago, a lot of *Dragon Empires* had yet to be shown to the public and many of the features were still pieces of code rather than a working game your average Joe could look at, play and enjoy. Well, a lot has changed in ten months!

This is my last diary entry in *PC ZONE* and so also my chance to say thank you for reading and I hope you've enjoyed the ride. It's also my chance to give you a quick run down of the latest developments before we start getting even busier in the lead up to our autumn launch.

In the past month, we've seen great advances in the game as a new user interface has been implemented. This new, more streamlined UI is

**"The world has exploded with wolves, spiders and beasts of all kinds over the last month"**

far more intuitive and enjoyable to use and we look forward to passing it to our testers to try out in the first beta soon.

We've also made a lot of progress in adding quests to the game and we're just starting to add the very first of the 500 quests that players will be able to enjoy. We're quite excited about our quests as they offer you a degree of freedom and interaction not normally seen in a MMORPG. Many of our quests will let you act good, evil or indifferent as you see fit – and we think this helps to immerse players in the world and keep them interested in the stories our quests tell.

Finally, the world is starting to overflow with monsters! From a handful of tester creatures, the world has exploded over the last month, with dozens of monsters roaming around the cities and mountains. Wolves, spiders and beasts of all kinds can be found minding their own business (or sometimes yours), and they promise great adventures for our testers.

Developing an MMORPG is a lot of fun. We take great pleasure in bringing forth our ideas and visions of a fun world to play in and enjoy showing this world to gamers everywhere. I hope this column has given you some insight into games development, our vision and the world of *Dragon Empires* over the past few months.

Peter Tyson

# X2 XTRA

MOD TOOLS TAKE SPACE SIM WHERE NO SIM HAS GONE BEFORE



The script editor makes your fleet even more adaptable.



Build your own galaxy, any colour at all.

**AT LONG LAST**, Egosoft has made the dreams of a million space traders come true with the release of a full suite of modding tools for *X2: The Threat* (reviewed issue 138, 92%). Released in conjunction with the main game's v1.3 patch, the modding tools let you delve into the *X* universe and warp things as you see fit.

The galaxy editor means whole new sectors are now opened up, although getting them to work

alongside existing sectors is a touch laborious – instead, it's designed to let you create an entire galaxy from scratch. Ship, station and text details can all be edited at will, while owners of 3DS Max can now import brand-new ship designs into the game.

Most welcome is the final unveiling of the AI script editor, finally enabling you to design and share autonomous ship computer routines. This was the feature that had been promised from

the very early days of *X2*'s creation, and means the game is now completely open for players to build massive trading empires. It also paves the way for the much-anticipated MMOG version of the sim, currently in the early stages of development.

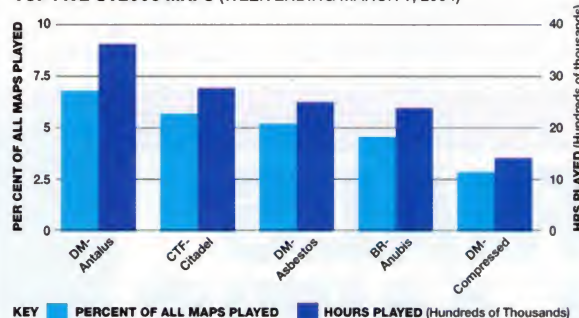
- Publisher: Deep Silver
- Developer: Egosoft
- ETA: Out now
- Website: [www.egosoft.com](http://www.egosoft.com)

# STATZONE

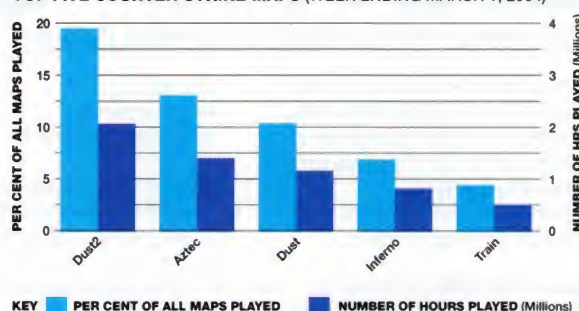
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

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TOP FIVE UT2003 MAPS (WEEK ENDING MARCH 1, 2004)

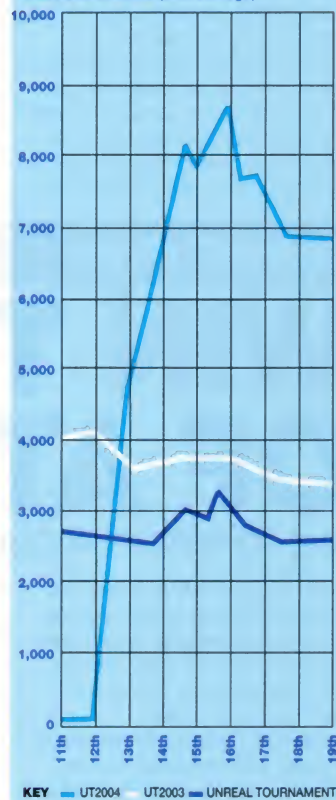


TOP FIVE COUNTER-STRIKE MAPS (WEEK ENDING MARCH 1, 2004)



UNREAL GAMEPLAY AROUND LAUNCH OF UT 2004 DEMO (FEBRUARY 2004)

PLAYERS ONLINE (Mov average)





# WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

**MATT FIROR**, Dark Age Of Camelot: Trials Of Atlantis

**"This is a land full of lava and the sky is always blood red. It's not a relaxing place"**

**MATT FIROR**  
DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: TRIALS OF ATLANTIS

**EXPANSION PACKS.** Just a few extra levels and maps and a handful of bug fixes right? Tell that to Matt Firor. For *Trials Of Atlantis*, the latest booster pack for the long-running *Dark Age Of Camelot*, his design team at Mythic Entertainment has taken the two-year-old engine and revamped everything from the ground to the sky, both in the original lands and in the new locales.

"Everything's much more expansive now," says Firor. "There are about 15 'terrain' zones, plus about six or seven dungeons and special areas. This is a very large expansion that contains almost as much content as the game did when it launched two years ago."

There are four lands covering the new Atlantis regions – the deserts of Stygia, the submerged temples

of Oceanus, the stifling heat of Volcanus and the floating city of Aerus. Firor makes no bones about which world has had the biggest impact on him personally, "Definitely anywhere in Volcanus. This is a land full of lava, big Taurus (Minotaur-like creatures), and the sky is always blood red. It's not a relaxing place by any stretch of the imagination."

As well as TOA's new terrain engine, Mythic is employing a new technology for displaying trees. SpeedTree™ is a component system, developed by Interactive Data Visualization Inc., that turns previously generic saplings into virtually lifelike foliage. Combined with the reflective water techniques, *Trials Of Atlantis* has ensured that DAOC can still manage to

hold its own with more recent MMOG releases.

"*Trials Of Atlantis* features a very substantial graphics engine upgrade," explains Firor. "This makes everything look very, very nice. I'd have to say that I'm proud of the way that the physical lands of Atlantis look as a whole – we feel that *Trials Of Atlantis* looks as good as any other online role-player on the market right now." We'll take a detailed look next month. [E]

■ **Publisher:** Wanadoo ■ **Developer:** Mythic Entertainment  
■ **ETA:** Out Now ■ **Website:** [www.trialsofatlantis.com](http://www.trialsofatlantis.com)





Test your new blade on this mangy old mutt.

## Go wild in the country...

### THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** NevraX  
**PUBLISHER** TBC  
**WEBSITE** [www.ryzom.com](http://www.ryzom.com)  
**ETA** May

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A ripping fantasy yarn with small regard for MMOG repetition
- Mix ingredients at random with novel new magic system
- Up to 255 characters on screen at once
- Transform your wizard into a warrior over time
- Inventions named after guilds that unearthed them



CV

NEVRAX

### NEVRAX

Conceived many years ago on paper, *The Saga Of Ryzom* is the first game to appear under the NevraX label. Production started in 1999, and although it took CEO David Cohen nine months to lure tech specialist Daniel Miller from Sony's UK office, the team expanded quickly to nearly 50. According to Cohen, Miller, previously with developer Attention To Detail, is a whiz with multiplayer technology. A number of Cohen's childhood *Dungeons & Dragons* buddies, including customer support manager 'Vince D', also work at NevraX's Paris HQ.

# THE SAGA OF RYZOM

**Will Sargent sticks a fig leaf to his crotch and heads off to form the world's first naturists' guild**

**NATURE** and technology are awkward bedfellows at the best of times, so it's no surprise that the two dominant factions of the planet Atys have been going at it hammer and tongs for the past 2,000 years. Come May, you'll have a VIP invite to tip the balance of this power struggle, but will you don wholemeal sandals and dance naked in the elven woods with the Kami, or hitch a lift aboard the pollution-spreading rocket ships of the Karavan? The choice, as ever, is yours.

### FRENCH FANCIES

Growing up in rural France, NevraX's CEO and producer, David Cohen, admits he's a bit of a tree-hugger himself (that's one for the Kami, then). No small amount of the inspiration for this, his four-year gaming labour of love was kindled by dreamy childhood days playing in the forests of his home town of Bazemont, roughly 50km from NevraX's Paris HQ.



Deep down in the Prime Roots, mother nature takes care of lighting.



Throw some environmentally-friendly shapes in the local vegan discotheque.



Run for your life!

"Stuck out in the countryside we got into *Dungeons & Dragons* from a young age," he reminisces. "I was always the DM, coming up with impossible scenarios for my friends to tackle. I made their lives hell, but this is how my interest in gaming and *The Saga Of Ryzom* came about."

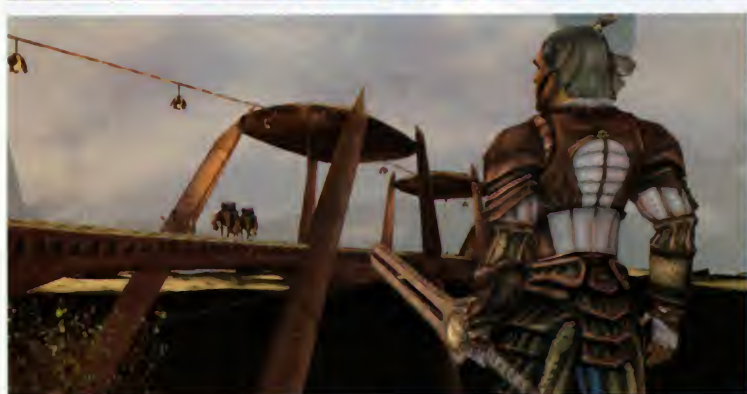
Cohen feels that most MMOGs don't offer the kind of immersion he deems necessary for a believable role-playing world: "*Ryzom* is different in terms of environment. The planet Atys is a living, breathing world, teeming with life. It's an organic planet that just keeps on growing. Imagine the layers of an onion: the planet surface is one layer, but forming above you in the canopies is the next planet layer. Below are the Prime Roots, which have a different atmosphere altogether, dark and foreboding. Down there is where *The Saga Of Ryzom* unfolds."



Four of you, one of me –  
I make that Pimms o'clock.



The guild is set. It's a sunny day. Let's rock!



In the main, *Ryzom* follows a well-trodden MMOG path – newbie saddles-up, learns a skill, joins a guild, undertakes quests, wins over one of four civilisations and eventually rules the world. However, on top of that there are subtleties at play which promise to make this more than another by-the-numbers forage 'em up.

#### CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

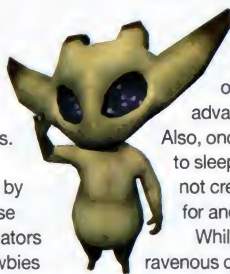
For starters, NPC behaviour changes to reflect both seasonal and smaller cycles, such as day and night. Values for both creatures and plant life are constantly tweaked, and resources vary in amount and quality depending on the time of day. Sounds like programming hell for Nevra's caffeine-addled coders, but at least they were still smiling on the day we visited.

We tested the theory during a brief hands-on session, when we were told it might be advantageous to know that mushrooms are most prevalent early in spring mornings. Great, fungoids everywhere, but we'll need some meat

and black pudding to cook up a decent Full English...

What's more, because man is not the dominant species across the bountiful plains of Atys, there are potential pitfalls at every turn, as Cohen divulges.

"There are these beautiful areas where you want to picnic by day, but when night comes these environments change and predators come out. That's not to say newbies



should run scared, because they'll be able to take advantage of some situations. Animal Als have their own envies, fears and needs and so they react to each other as well as players."

He continues: "You'll come across injured beasts who'll have been involved in devastating fights with other giants, so why not take advantage and finish them off? Also, once you know wild dogs tend to sleep on the forest edge, why not creep up from inside the forest for another easy kill?"

While the stars shimmer above ravenous carnivores merrily ripping

chunks from docile plant eaters, it's the insectoid Kitin that any wandering hominid with a love of their limbs should watch out for. Swarming across the land in a *Starship Troopers*-fashion, these evil buggers have caused no end of trouble for the planet's four civilisations over the past 2,000 years. Rest assured, if you can pull off a few giant spiders' legs on your travels, it's sure to curry favour with tribes of all factions.

### "Animal Als have their own envies, fears and needs and so they react to each other as well as players"

DAVID COHEN CEO, NEVRAX

"A real strength of *Ryzom* will be its massive combat system," adds Cohen. "We have the technology for up to 255 characters on screen at any one time. To put this into perspective, other recent MMOGs can handle around ten characters at a time." Sounds impressive, and although we're assured a 56K modem will handle such frenzied battlefields, we'll have to see it with our own eyes to believe it.

#### SHOW AND TELL

Atys is a stunning setting for sure, showing potential to nick a small, if decent, chunk of *EverQuest*'s monthly subscription fund. Its sprawling deserts, jungles and lakes convey perfectly the feeling of a planet in the merciless grip of nature, and while Nevra's adventure will appeal instantly to hardcore *D&D* fantasy buffs, its video tutorials, step-by-step interface guides, modular magic system (see box, left) and third/first-person viewpoints should draw in newcomers too. We'll reveal more with a hands-on play from the beta test next month. **PC**

#### WHAT'S COOKING?



Kitin invasion! Time for a sharp exit.

#### COOK UP YOUR OWN MAGIC WITH THE MODULAR MAGIC SYSTEM

Adventurers with a wand-waving bent will be interested to know that *Ryzom* uses a recipe-based magic system. As you travel the lush lands of Atys, you'll find component 'ingredients' for spells, which you can combine in any way you choose to overcome the nearest group of beasts. For example, when you find that the giant Kitin insects have a weakness to the cold, why not mix in more cold elements using the simple drag-and-drop 'Spell-U-Like' interface. Of course, half the fun of being a trainee wizard is that some of your concoctions might backfire – but imagine the juicy spells you'll be able to trade once you've stumbled across a potent new mix.





"Fear not! We are the Avengers League of Fantastic Non-Copyright-Breaking Heroes!"

# Holy spandex! It's... CITY OF HEROES



## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Cryptic Studios  
**PUBLISHER** NCsoft  
**WEBSITE** [www.cityofheroes.com](http://www.cityofheroes.com)  
**ETA** TBA

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- No rat-killing!
- Incredibly detailed hero creation
- Exploring a city is better than hacking at wilderness
- It's got all the superpowers you've ever wanted
- Heroes' sidekicks broaden the MMOG dynamic

CV

CRYPTIC  
STUDIOS

## CRYPTIC STUDIOS

Assembled in 2000, Cryptic is dedicated to the creation of MMOGs. This will be the first effort from this independent studio, which houses veterans of the PC, console and pen & dice industries. Team members' credits include design chores on *San Francisco Rush 2049* and *Gauntlet Legends*. Tellingly, some of the writing staff have previously penned *AD&D Dragonlance: Rise Of The Titans* and the *Fantastic Four* roster for the *Marvel Super Heroes* adventure game.

Since Gotham City wouldn't have him, **Russ Fischer** tries his hand at saving Paragon City instead

**FOR ANYONE** who's not a dab hand with a blade, the MMOG scene could be accused of stagnation. There are only so many leather jerkins a lad can take, before he begins to long for the touch of, well, more clingy garments. If that sounds familiar, then book your passage to Paragon City, the sprawling metropolis in Cryptic Studios' *City Of Heroes*. Populated by an astounding array of men (and women) in tights, we may finally have an antidote to 'EverCrack'.

The problem with doing superheroes is that with the wrong approach, they come off more camp than a Boy George lookalike contest. But Cryptic has managed to strike the right note – minus playable supervillains – and its love for unrealistic powers shines through.

## CATWALK CAPERS

To make your spandex dreams a reality, *COH* features a character creation system thorough enough to please Stan Lee. Particular attention has been paid to the most important facet of justice – costumes. The complete line of fins, flares, half-masks, bionic arms and

micro-managed colour schemes is enough to make a sidekick-in-waiting out of anyone. Capes and robes are out, though, because they unduly tax the rendering engine.

Typically, when a publisher proffers 'thousands' of customisation options, it might as well be promising to halt that receding hairline as well. But I wandered around Paragon City for hours, and never saw a pair of lookalike do-gooders. Not once. Military, mutant, magical or historical, the options make the game much more inviting and actually (gasp!) could lead to role-playing.

## FEEL MY JUSTICE

But a flashy adventuring kit is merely the beginning. The power sets allow for far more character possibilities than your

typical warrior/mage/thief triumvirate. There are five major character types (see 'Justice Be My Destiny', right), and for each class, you have a choice of several primary and secondary power sets, with nine tiers of abilities apiece. Factor in developing latent abilities and enhancements to tweak each power and the potential combinations are mind-boggling.

If that seems like too many possibilities to narrow down, Cryptic apparently agrees. Unlike many stingy MMOGs, *COH* provides slots for six crime fighters per account, so there's room to experiment. Enhancements, which can be purchased with fame or found in combat, not only refine your abilities, but can be combined in mystic ways to further complicate the process

**"All that time spent pressing your tights won't be in vain, because every detail is on display"**





"Hah! Taste the Opaque Egg of Justice!"



"Foul robot fiends... Be gone!"

of becoming a badass. While roaming the streets of Paragon, dazzling displays of power will catch your eye as your peers go to work, which in turn become a huge incentive to press on yourself.

#### CRISIS CITY

The primary concession to the typical MMOG structure is the mission system, which works much like any other. Newbies are treated to a collection of contacts, from which is built a network of key personalities holding the keys to a story. Without supervillains per se, Cryptic relies on an interconnected set of gangs, aliens and large beasts to act as antagonists. Quests worthy of a 12-issue hardcover graphic novel series are well and good, but the streets also offer plenty of head-cracking opportunities between plots.

As any emerging developer should, Cryptic has cobbled together a unique game engine, humbly naming it... The Cryptic engine. But when your first effort pumps out polygons like this one does, humility isn't really an issue.

All that time spent pressing your



"Gah! Tis the Bionic Bureaucrat!"

tights won't be in vain, because every detail is on display, right down to the codpiece. Even without super-vision, scuffles taking place a block away can be plainly seen, and enough NPC pedestrians travel the streets that you could mistake Paragon for Vice City. The skylines and day/night cycle effects also look sharp, creating a monolithic urban landscape.

#### I'LL PROTECT YOU, CHUM!

Superteams are an integral part of *City Of Heroes*, and there are a few options for the budding leader. Sending a call for team-hungry characters is a basic part of the interface, and after hitting a certain level, you can register supergroups with the higher-ups in City Hall, opening up benefits and technology.



"Your wooden stick is no match for my Shining Catsuit of Improbable Coverage!"

Several mission objectives require dedicated teamwork, but in the early stages players may be wary of committing to the full-time work of team adventuring. In that case, the Sidekick function is a key feature. High-level characters can draw newbies into a Batman/Robin-type relationship, without even requiring them to wear little green pants. As long as the sidekick stays within a set distance of their buddy, they get a significant stat and power boost, which makes tough battles possible for even very new players. It's a brilliant idea

that opens the game up while staying true to the basic inspiration.

In the past month, I've spent more than my fair share of evenings digging into the beta test, with all the disconnections, database burps and map server issues that entails. Despite a million of the usual beta testing frustrations, I still get excited about coming back to *City Of Heroes*. Even unfinished, it looks great and has a lot of small touches that really make the premise come alive. I've never been so keen on wearing spandex in my life. [X]

### JUSTICE BE MY DESTINY

THE FIVE CHARACTER ARCHETYPES CORRESPOND VAGUELY TO ROLE-PLAYING CLASSICS, BUT THEY'VE GOT THEIR OWN UNIQUE QUALITIES TOO

The Blaster is your basic long-range powerhouse, with nowt but tissue paper protection up close. The Controller and Defender are both weaklings, but while the Controller can restrain and manipulate foes from afar, the Defender heals (buffs) friends while debuffing the enemy. Like the name says, the Scrapper is the most dangerous hand-to-hand fighter, but is limited by a total lack of distance tactics. Then there's the Tanker – a hulking mountain of muscle, with a propensity to dish out damage matched by the ability to take it. The choice is yours.



Variety is the spice of superhero life.



# FIGHT CLUB



**FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ J00**  
**FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE & REX MUNDI**

**THE WAR-TORN** maps of *Call Of Duty* beckoned the Fight Clubbers last month, with a frag-per-minute ratio somewhere in the hundreds. A healthy mixture of Team Deathmatches, Search And Destroying and Free-For-Alls kept things varied and interesting, with even dour Northerner Jamie Sefton jumping into the fray for the first time in months.

While Prezzer fiddled with his grenades (blowing himself up on no less than five occasions), Will, Korda, Jamie and Ant kept up office morale (and scores), especially in the free-for-all rounds in which a death was being recorded once every two seconds on average.

**COME & 'AVE A GO!**  
[www.zonegames.co.uk](http://www.zonegames.co.uk)  
**for all the info**

It was definitely a case of Attack Of The Clans this month, with representatives of the impressive I-eS and IUKFC! putting in appearances (take a bow Jizz, Penn, Redfive, Hixie and Blitz), along with old faces such as RavenCDF and G\_Man\_007 faring well against the 'all-conquering might' of the ZONE boys (cough).  
 Now, a small printing error in last month's upcoming Fight Club schedule. The *Battlefield Vietnam* Fight Club (listed as April 1) should have read June 3, as below. Sorry for any confusion caused. April's Fight Club was *Unreal 2 XMP* of course. We'll have details on how that went next month.

## WHO'S WHO

Paul Presley	Prezzer
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Jamie Malcolm	Braveart
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Phil Wand	Wandy
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat



The Killcam - Prezzer's most frequent viewpoint.



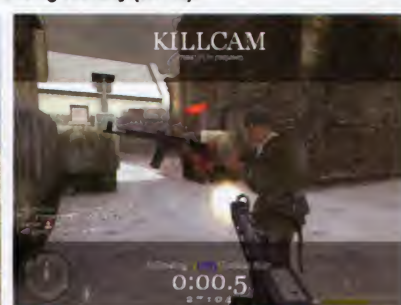
The action didn't let up for a minute.



The readers get lucky (ahem).



Will wins World War II again.



You're supposed to hold the gun and fire the bullets, not...

## UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

### THURSDAY MAY 6

6.30pm - 9.00pm  
*Unreal Tournament 2004*

### THURSDAY JUNE 3

6.30pm - 9.00pm  
*Battlefield Vietnam*

### THURSDAY JULY 1

6.30pm - 9.00pm  
*Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*





# ZONECHAT

RECORDED IN FRONT OF A LIVE STUDIO AUDIENCE...

## ARTIFICIAL

intelligence. No, not the mental state of ZONE Chat's dynamic duo, Prezzer and Will, but the topic du jour for last month's two-hour text-based chinwag with our readers. Plenty of thoughts were raised, examples compared and points dissected. Of course, that all went to pot as soon as Will and Prez started arguing about quicksaves and the competitions were announced. Congratulations to Asriel and Aceman for winning copies of *Jedi Academy* and *Secret Weapons Over Normandy* respectively. As always, the full transcript can be found on [www.zonegames.co.uk](http://www.zonegames.co.uk) if you missed the chance to join in.

If you want to take part in the next ZONE Chat, you'll require an IRC program – we recommend mIRC ([www.mirc.com](http://www.mirc.com)) as the most straightforward and easy to use. Once installed and set up, log on to [irc.uk.quakenet.org](http://irc.uk.quakenet.org) then type `/join #pcz` to enter the PC ZONE channel. There you'll find a whole gaggle of your fellow Zoners, eager to hold court

on matters of great import. Or just what they're listening to on their iPods.

This month ZONE Chat is on Tuesday, not Wednesday. That's Tuesday April 6, 5-7pm in the #pcz channel. There'll be fun and games for all, including the chance to win a very special jacket.

You'll need this very issue of ZONE nearby to win, so don't put it in the cat's litter tray just yet. We'll also be covering such weighty topics as games on television and music in games, as well as answering your questions about the mag. See you then!

**TUESDAY  
APRIL 6  
5.00PM – 7.00PM**



## LAN ROVER

### STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL MINDS HIS LAN-GUAGE...

I'm trying out new ways to present LAN Rover to you all – this month I'm going for date order – next month I'll be going from north to south. Give me your feedback at [scalper@ggfan.co.uk](mailto:scalper@ggfan.co.uk)

■ If you're a PC ZONE subscriber, you'll have to act quickly to get to the [www.centralanuk.co.uk](http://www.centralanuk.co.uk) which runs from April 2-4.

■ If you're kicking your heels on April 10 and live near Spalding, Lincolnshire, you can enjoy 14 hours of gaming for just £5. Check out Event 11, hosted by [www.fenlanarena.co.uk](http://www.fenlanarena.co.uk).

■ If you're off for the Easter bank holiday, then you may want to consider [www.dreamlan.co.uk](http://www.dreamlan.co.uk) from April 9-12 for 50 players. It costs £45 for four days, or £60 if you want them to provide your food. Camping, BBQ, big screen films and someone trying to turn your urine blue can all be expected at these events.

■ [www.inknet.co.uk](http://www.inknet.co.uk) from April 10-12 is for 28 gamers. If you want to use one of their machines it's just £25 (and a short drive from Redditch) for the whole event. Or bring your own and pay £20.

■ [www.clanlan.net](http://www.clanlan.net) have finally set dates for the

year's events. Their second LAN goes from April 30 to May 2. They only charge £16, which includes the chance of seeing ghostly orbs in the haunted venue – and I thought it was just the alcohol and sleep deprivation.

■ The other four-day event of the month runs from April 30, held by [www.lanse.co.uk](http://www.lanse.co.uk) in High Wycombe and costs £20 in advance. Happy Easter – Scalper out.



Ghostly goings-on at ClanLan.

## GUILDHALL

### ▲ LOVE IS IN THE AIR. AND THE CLAN

Feeling lost and alone? Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

#### CLAN reLoaded

**CONTACT** [t1g3rm0nk3y@hotmail.com](mailto:t1g3rm0nk3y@hotmail.com) (rLIAndy)

**WEBSITE** [www.rl.creativegaming.net](http://www.rl.creativegaming.net)

**MAIN GAME** Counter-Strike

**DETAILS** New, but skilled clan needs support from the public to help us get bigger and bigger. We're entering many leagues like ClanBase, Enemy Down and the CSGN. Support us in Quakenet IRC channel #cs.reloaded, Clan leader is rLIAndy.

#### CLAN LTGamer & TM (Life Time Gamers & Team Merlin)

**CONTACT** [chrysis@wtmord.net](mailto:chrysis@wtmord.net)

**WEBSITE** [www.ltgamer.com](http://www.ltgamer.com)

**MAIN GAME** Call Of Duty

**DETAILS** We are an international Call Of Duty clan with members from Europe and North America. Our emphasis is on community and fun and we're always on the lookout for new members. If you're over 18 and like a laugh get in touch. You won't be sorry!

#### CLAN [DAD] Clan

**CONTACT** Nexus8 or Monty73

**WEBSITE** [www.dadclan.co.uk](http://www.dadclan.co.uk)

**MAIN GAMES** Call Of Duty, Medal Of Honor

**DETAILS** Started by dads for dads in 2000, this is a big family clan which requires you to actually be a dad (of any age) to join. We don't require members to be active players. We play for fun, though we have many top players and are a great community.

#### CLAN Harbinger Heavy Industries (HHI)

**CONTACT** Shard or John Prescott at website recruitment

**WEBSITE** [www.eve-hhi.com](http://www.eve-hhi.com)

**MAIN GAME** EVE Online

**DETAILS** Looking for experienced (cruiser drivers and better), honest, mature players for large friendly EVE corp. We supply all equipment in exchange for hard work doing whatever you enjoy and some mining. HHI is also a member of the coveted Fountain Alliance. No timewasters, non-team players or pirate wannabes.

#### CLAN: International Frag Force

**CONTACT** [rushty@fragforce.co.uk](mailto:rushty@fragforce.co.uk)

**WEBSITE** [www.fragforce.co.uk](http://www.fragforce.co.uk)

**MAIN GAME** UT 2004, America's Army, Call Of Duty, Soldier Of Fortune 2, BF1942, Desert Combat and Battlefield Vietnam

**DETAILS** We're a friendly and fun clan looking for players with the same outlook. We are international, the only restriction being that you must be 16 years or over to join. We have places available in all of the games listed above.

#### CLAN E3!Europe Elites

**CONTACT** [admin@grenade-boy.co.uk](mailto:admin@grenade-boy.co.uk)

**WEBSITE** [www.EuropeElites.co.nr](http://www.EuropeElites.co.nr), [www.E3-Forum.tk](http://www.E3-Forum.tk)

**MAIN GAME** Call Of Duty

**DETAILS** We are a brand new and successful clan for COD. We have won two clan wars and are looking for some skilled players to participate in our upcoming tournaments. We have a 56k squad, Broadband, ISDN and ADSL squad and a trainee squad for up-and-coming great E3!Europe Elites players!

To feature in Guildhall simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to [online.zone@pczone.co.uk](mailto:online.zone@pczone.co.uk) (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.





That'll never pass its MOT.

# BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

■ £29.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: DICE Canada

ETA: Out Now | [www.eagames.com](http://www.eagames.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 933MHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

**Paul Presley wanted a review, and for his sins we gave him one**



## INPERSPECTIVE

### BATTLEFIELD 1942: DELUXE EDITION

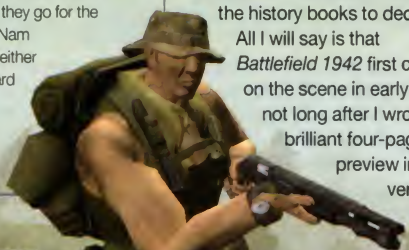
**Reviewed Issue 136, Score 85%**

A phenomenon: this set the bar for all team-based online shooters and rightly so. *BFV* is better, but can it disrupt the established fanbase? Only time will tell.

### VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA

**Reviewed Issue 139, Score 70%**

Add-on to the original *Vietcong*, and although they go for the more full-on 'Nam experience, neither cut the mustard as a decent shooter – online or off.



**NOW I'M** not going to say that I discovered the *Battlefield* series, or that without my personal involvement in the game's development it wouldn't have happened. Nor will I espouse that because of me and me alone, hundreds of thousands of gamers across the world (and Ipswich) have spent the last two years engaging in multiplayer goodness or anything. That's for the history books to decide.

All I will say is that *Battlefield 1942* first came on the scene in early 2002, not long after I wrote a brilliant four-page preview in this very

magazine. Since then, it's gone on to be one of the most popular online shooters ever. Coincidence? Over to you, history books.

Regardless of however great I may be, the chaps and chapesses over at developer DICE aren't too shabby either. Having realised (probably through my words) how special its coding talents were, the team grew and grew, created a Canadian off-shoot and set

about exploiting the property for all it was worth. We still await potential classics such as *Battlefield Falklands*, *Battlefield Earth* and *Battlefield Jessops' Car Park On A Friday Night*. Until that time, DICE and EA have decided to land the first spin-off in that lesser known conflict – Vietnam.

### BACK TO NAM

What we're looking at here is little more than the original

*BF1942*'s tried and tested gameplay dynamics in a leafier setting. Two sides go to war, then battle for control over varying numbers of respawn points across each map while their team's 'tickets' whittle away to zero. Control more points and they don't go down as fast. Control none and not only do the numbers start whizzing like an incontinent coffee drinker, but you can't respawn until the players left on your side manage

**"It's war as 64-player entertainment – not a harrowing BBC3 documentary in interactive gaming form"**





Have they never heard of rim-bearing swing bridges?



to recapture one. The first team to zero loses.

It's war as 64-player entertainment – not harrowing BBC3 documentary in interactive gaming form. Naturally, the fact that someone can actually 'lose' this Vietnam war is as good an indication as any that we're not talking actual simulation here. (Nobody 'lost' the real Vietnam war silly, they just performed an extended strategic withdrawal and will no doubt head on back in at some point if Junior wins a second term in office.)

#### INCH BY INCH

Assuming that your requirements lean more towards the enjoyable round-based shooter end of the spectrum, *BFV* is a fine step up from the previous title, eradicating many



Butlins was getting worse and worse every year.

of the little issues that plagued *BF1942* and adding just enough variety to warrant tearing yourself away from all your WWII shenanigans.

For a start, DICE has tightened up the AI-bot code, making single-player sessions practically a mirror of the multiplayer equivalents. There's still not much sense of overall strategy at work on any of the maps, mainly due to the lack of a command structure in online team-based games. That's never really been what the *Battlefield* experience is all about however, so it's no real loss.

You do find that there's often a naturally emerging front line to each battle, evolving almost organically from the actions of each player as they rush to win control points away from the enemy. This is all down to each



## SECOND OPINION

WILL PORTER

The joy of the *Battlefield* franchise is that whenever I play, something impresses me – a thrilling chase, a gobsmacking aerial battle or a plucky soldier with low health somehow managing to blow apart a tank with his final grenade. *BF* gets your adrenalin pumping.

*Battlefield Vietnam* provides all this and then some. More intense fighting, an authentic (albeit sanitised) 'Nam vibe and a multitude of vehicles that give numerous cool moments.

Helicopters are tricky to handle and airlifting nigh-on impossible, but this not only allows for a fair degree of comic ineptness, it also offers a place for real pros to learn, practise and amaze.

There's no revolution here – it's just *BF1942* with knobs on. But I think you'll agree they're bloody good knobs.



"How about some Chas'n'Dave instead of Wagner for a change?"



"Just one look and then his heart went boom."

## CHARLIE'S ALL OVER, MAN

VIETNAM IS EVERYWHERE RIGHT NOW. NOT LITERALLY OF COURSE, THAT WOULD BE MESSY

From a gaming standpoint, you can't advance more than five clicks these days without running into an AI-controlled communist. *Conflict: Vietnam*, *Shellshock: 'Nam '69*, *Men Of Valium* (or whatever it is) and that *Alpha* one I can't bring myself to say in full without feeling the need to have a wash afterwards (you know, the *Vietcong* add-on).

With all that competition vying for the jungle warfare dollar, you have to ask yourself what you're looking for from your Vietnamese gaming experience. If you've just seen Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen gurning their way through *Apocalypse Now* and want to recreate the whole 'horror of war, how can mankind commit such atrocity unto himself, the first casualty of war is innocence' experience, then *Battlefield Vietnam* isn't really your bag. Try the Territorial Army instead.



Oh, the horror. They'll never get those blood stains out.





It wouldn't be Vietnam without painted sharks' teeth choppers.

**"It's not ground-breaking online gameplay, but it's easily the best of the current crop"**



Put on your 3D glasses now.



Never get off the boat...

the like. Plus, the helicopters, although improved, are still a bugger to just keep airborne, let alone perform the complex task of hovering into the precise position needed to pick up a jeep. Hell, when even the bots crash them into the scenery nine times out of ten, what hope do we simple humans have?

#### TONIGHT'S MOVIE...

Ultimately, though, it's that very 'Vietnam-ness' that makes the game so endearing and keeps you coming back. Features such as the licensed 'period' level-loading music (one of the best in-game soundtracks since *Mafia*), the Robin Williams-alike DJ blaring out or the 'Go home GI' psychological warfare tannoy announcements all add to your gaming experience. That and the simple fact that the *Battlefield* gameplay works and the developer has seen no need to change it here.

As an online, multiplayer gameplay dynamic, DICE's template has worked right back to the days of *Codename Eagle*.

## KEEP 'EM COMING

### IT'S MONEY-BY-NUMBERS FOR EA

If I were Electronic Arts (and in a perfect world I would be), I'd throw a couple of million dollars from the petty cash drawer at a gaggle of landscape artists and designer teams, then get each unit to start knocking up battle maps and vehicle models for every major conflict this shining ball called Earth has known in the last 428 years (429 at a pinch). I'd then shove them all into the currently existing *Battlefield* game engine and sit back laughing as the cash rolls in. *Battlefield Crimea*. *Battlefield 1914*. *Battlefield Iraq*. If EA doesn't do it, the amateur mod-makers will and where's the profit in that? That fancy yacht won't pay for itself you know. Unless it's some sort of hi-tech *Knight Rider*-style crime-fighting yacht that can also make deals on the stock market. Now there's a thought...



Into the valley of death rode the 32-64 players.

So, as long as EA's Expensive Suit Division doesn't feel the need for unnecessary 'improvements' in order to 'fulfil emerging market dynamics', the *BF* series should continue to run and run for years to come.

numbers from 32 to 64, the variety of map locations to fight across and the hardware available to utilise means that *BFV* is easily the best of the current crop. And this time it isn't all down to me. [P]

#### IT'S A WORD

Being the same basic game as *BF1942* could have tarnished *BFV* with the brush of pointlessness. Instead, DICE has done enough to justify the status of sequel rather than expansion pack. It looks great, sounds funky and plays superbly.

It's no paradigm shift in terms of ground-breaking online gameplay or anything, but just upping the potential player

#### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Same well-structured *Battlefield* gameplay
- ✓ Plenty of 'Nam atmosphere
- ✓ 64-player maps make for cool battles
- ✓ Improved bot AI
- ✗ Still no strategy
- ✗ Helicopters still need work

# 87

Junglist massive



***WHERE PARADISE ENDS...***







Trying to light a fag while driving is never a good idea.



If only he knew.



Have it!



Do you mind not bleeding on the sand? This is a family beach.

# UNREAL II: EXPANDED MULTIPLAYER

■ Free download | Pub: Atari | Dev: Legend Entertainment |  
ETA: Out Now | [www.u2xmp.com](http://www.u2xmp.com)

**REQUIRES** PIII 733, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, 56K modem, full copy of *Unreal II: The Awakening*  
**DESIRES** P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, 1MB ADSL connection

**Martin Korda got FUBAR by online shooter XMP, then went AWOL when his review was due**

**WELL**, it only took them 12 months I suppose. Which isn't really *that* long – if you're an elf or a giant turtle, that is. For the rest of us, it's felt like a lifetime for this *Unreal II* multiplayer patch to arrive. Fashionably called *XMP* – much cooler than its spod-like and grossly misleading full title *Expanded Multiplayer* – it bears more than an uncanny resemblance to the new *Onslaught* mode in *UT 2004*, with a hint of Capture the Flag thrown in for good measure. Still, for the uninitiated, a little more detail before we start casting judgements. M'kay?

*XMP* is a tale of two teams vying for control of four artefacts. To win, you have to break into the enemy's stronghold, nab the booty and leg it back home without getting your legs blown off. Should be easy, right? Well, no actually.

See, the problem lies with energy – or rather, the lack of it. Dotted liberally around each map are power generators, which must be captured to fuel your team's war effort. The more power you possess, the more vehicles you can drive and turrets you can man. Or should that be person? Hard to tell these days. Moving on...

## X MARKS THE SPOT

The three class types at your disposal here are varied. Gunners are your bog-standard heavily armed, thickly protected human battering rams that walk slower than a gammy-kneed sumo wrestler. Rangers are masters of infiltration and speed, with the ability to heal team-mates; while playing as the Tech class allows you to hack faster and deploy battlefield defences and turrets. Each class has a superb array of weaponry and controlling each one is subtly, yet fundamentally different. What's more, the ability to leap great heights with your fitted jumpjets makes for some interesting duelling.

Success then, is based on teamwork. So it's a real shame

that the small number of people playing *XMP* generally consists of glory boys and waste-of-spacers. However, on the rare occasions when you do stumble across a well-organised team, *XMP* is very nearly a joy to play.

## NEARLY?

Yes, nearly. Y'see, *XMP* could and should have been so much better than it is. All the elements for success are there, yet they're hampered by several annoying shortcomings.

First, on anything under a 1MB pipe, games can often chug more painfully than a rusty steam train, making sniping a redundant art, while controlling vehicles is next to impossible. What's more, most of the vehicles are far too cumbersome to be effective, and it's way too easy for a lone gunner to take out a lumbering tank.



The team that supplies together, dies together.

Add to this the small number of servers – about 50 on average – the majority of which are nearly or completely empty, plus the limited appeal of just one game mode and it's hard to see much

of a future for *XMP*. Once *UT 2004* takes off with its vastly superior vehicles, it could all be over for this belated patch. Yes it's fun, but short of a miracle, its days are numbered. That'll teach it to keep us waiting. Now, where did I put my pension book? **PCZ**

## INPERSPECTIVE

### COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

Reviewed Issue 140, Score 83%

It may be old, but with the addition of *Condition Zero*'s incredible bots, you'll never have to suffer an empty server or play with twats again.

### UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 91%

A stunning return to form for the *UT* series: *UT 2004*'s *Onslaught* mode alone is infinitely superior to *XMP*.

**"The small number of people playing *XMP* consists of glory boys and waste-of-spacers"**

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks amazing
- ✓ Perfect for teamwork
- ✓ Excellent player classes and game mechanics
- ✗ Limited long-term appeal
- ✗ Often too lag-laden, even with broadband
- ✗ Not much teamwork going on

# 73

Good, but no *UT 2004*



*...AND HELL BEGINS*

# FARCRY™



[www.farcry-thegame.com/uk/](http://www.farcry-thegame.com/uk/)



90%

"This is simply as good as action games get" - PC Format



93%

"The most exciting shooter since Half Life" - PC Zone



91%

"One of the best shooters ever seen on the PC" - PC Gamer



ects\* 2003  
interactive entertainment awards



PLAYS BEST ON  
ALIENWARE

Developed By

CRYTEK



UBISOFT



# SVEN CO-OP V.3.0



SIZE 127MB REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life  
[www.svencoop.com](http://www.svencoop.com)

TOTAL CONVERSION

No sign of Nancy as *Tony Lamb* lends a helping hand



Like *The Dark Crystal* gone bad.

**FEW** *Half-Life* mods have as illustrious a history as *Sven Co-Op*. Now up to version 3.0 and having celebrated its fifth birthday, this old favourite continues to showcase the sheer quality of *Half-Life* add-ons.

Where *Sven Co-Op* carves its niche, as the name suggests, is in the co-operative game. This rarely seen multiplayer option

means the human players can fight together and take on the various nasties.

Throughout its five years of development, *Sven Co-Op* has gone beyond mere gameplay tweaks, adding in a raft of new alien life forms possessing ever more inventive and unpleasant ways to kill you. New weapons, non-player characters and non-

hostile monsters that can be made to do your bidding now add more thrills, and the addition of Steam support brings a new lease of life too. The whole thing can be highly immersive, as you find yourself desperately pleading for assistance in dispatching whichever particular alien ghoul fancies having you for its next aperitif.



The T-1000 isn't even trying these days.



"Chicken!"



"Gordon! Yoo-hoo! Over here!"

*Sven Co-Op* up there at the top.

This has always been one of the most popular and best-supported mods. A good game is still only a few clicks away.

PCZONE  
VERDICT

89

An absolutely  
essential must-have

# HYDRORACERS V1.6



SIZE 24MB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield 1942

[www.planetbattlefield.com/bf2029/hydroracers](http://www.planetbattlefield.com/bf2029/hydroracers)

*Tony Lamb* gets moist from the splash damage

**THIS TITLE** skilfully combines two American obsessions into one *BF1942* mod – making things go absurdly fast and then blowing them to smithereens. You combine featherweight boats

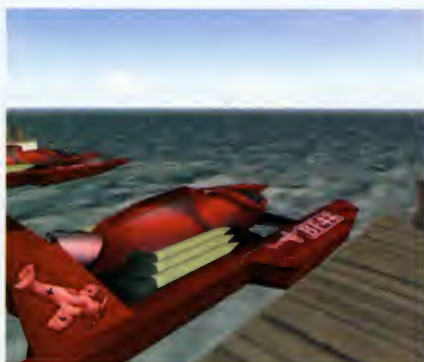
with huge engines and big guns – the theory being that if you aren't a good enough shot to kill other people, you can still drive something so ludicrously dangerous that you'll probably take them out by smashing into

them instead.

*HydroRacers* is all about fast little boats armed with a variety of outrageous weaponry, zipping around capturing flag-points and



TOTAL CONVERSION



An impressive schooner.



Come in number five, your time is up.

blasting the daylights out of anything that moves. When you add in mini-submarines, torpedo boats that drop mines or multi-warhead anti-sub weapons, and floating bases with defences aplenty, you see the opportunity for fast-paced mayhem is readily apparent. It's *Battlefield* meets *Waterworld* – and it's as mad as it sounds.

*HydroRacers* hasn't got its own specific maps yet, so a modern-day biblical flood has submerged some of the standard ones, raising the water level to create water-based arenas. Aberdeen, for example, now consists of an archipelago

of tiny islands dotted with capture points, and some very good scuba opportunities. Other maps follow the same theme, with each team having its own base and sending out boats to do battle and capture flags.

At the moment, the shortage of online support makes it a LAN game for most. This is a pity because *HydroRacers* is a nicely off-the-wall idea that's well executed, with neatly modelled boats to boot – so a well-packed server would be a real scream. The physics can take some getting used to, but this ain't supposed to be a sim. Go for it.

PCZONE  
VERDICT

73

Water sports, anyone?



# a roleplayer's FANTASY.



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RPG' that seems to have  
done everything right."

- GameZone.com

"This is the Fantasy Action  
Adventure Reinvented"

- NVIDIA

[www.sacred-game.com](http://www.sacred-game.com)

# SACRED



- Huge world to explore on foot or horseback, comprised of 16 incredibly detailed regions, from woodland & desert to ice mass & wasteland
- Unique player characters such as the seraphim & vampiress
- Over 30 missions with hundreds of sub-quests
- Innovative combo system that combines combat & magic abilities
- Co-operative & pvp multiplayer modes



PC CD





# Getting started in... RUNNING A LAN PARTY

Any party can be hard to organise, especially when computers are concerned. **Steve Randall** shows you how to get switched on smoothly



## THE PLAYERS

**1** If you're in a clan or just play games online regularly on the same server, chances are you're going to know some other like-minded people. Eventually someone asks where you all come from and before you know it, you're meeting up. Even if it's just you and a few close friends gathering to burn rubber after a night in the pub, you're already having a LAN party. But if you want to get more than a handful of people involved, it's best to look online.

## THE GAMES

**3** For any LAN to be a success, you'll need to think about the games you're going to play. Not everyone wants to spend their time in adrenalin-filled fire-fights – some prefer the more sedate use of the mind. Think multiplayer. Think co-operative. *Diablo 2* is still very popular at LANs (although usually in the early hours) – and after a few beers and a lack of sleep, *Worms* still has a lot to offer. I've even seen *Dungeon Keeper* being played at a recent meeting, although it was sandwiched between *Need For Speed* and *Unreal Tournament* 'capture the flag' competitions.



## THE VENUE

**2** It's easy when you only have to cater for a handful of players, but if you want to step up to 15 or 1,500 people, you're going to have to look outside. Once you have a firm idea of the number of players you're expecting, subtract 25 per cent (for inevitable cancellations) and look everywhere. Local councils often have halls for hire, but you may have trouble staying overnight in them. Hotels are a good bet, but they will frown on you bringing in your own food and drink. I use a university conference room – they understand the student mentality of most lanners.



## THE PRIZES

**5** While organising the LAN itself is easy, keeping it going on a regular basis can prove quite tricky. The key is to ensure the attendees have fun. If you charge a little more than the hall hire, you should have some money left over for prizes. Or you can try to break through the barriers of games publishers' sweet-faced (but hard-as-nails) receptionists to get hold of the resident PR. Expect a lot of "send me an email" type responses. They are busy, but will read them and if you have a good reason for them to send you something, they often do.

## THE NETWORK

**4** Once everyone arrives, you need to get the computers talking. This is relatively easy if everyone's running XP – you'll need to grab yourself a switch (with enough ports for the number of players) and lots of CAT5 cable. If you can get the switch in position before people arrive and have a cable stuck to each seat, then all they need to do is plug in their computer. The NETGEAR FS526T switch automatically detects each machine's IP address and has 26 ports (24@10/100 and 2@10/100/1000). Plus, at a cost of less than £230, it's cheap, fast, reliable and expandable.





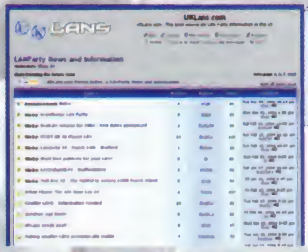


## THE GIMMICKS

**6** You obviously need to keep in touch with your attendees to ensure they're aware of your next event, but you really want them to be talking about it to other people as this will keep you with a constant supply of players. Gimmicks can often depend on weather – I've seen barbecues, football matches, films, bouncy castles and paintball games – but the most popular are usually those that offer free beer. The other star attraction would be a staff member from a games publisher/developer (or popular magazine), or you could always try and get yourself a bevy of beauties to hand out the prizes (good luck).

## THE WEBSITE

**8** You know what's going on – so let everyone else know as well. You need to keep a website updated with information constantly. If people are all asking the same thing, add the answer to a site FAQ. If you include a forum (and there are plenty out there for free), be sure to visit frequently, answer questions and start new topics, as people coming to your site will expect to see an active forum. They'll also want to know who's coming, if there's space for them and whether their favourite games will be popular. And always listen to feedback.



## THE MONEY

**9** Obviously, there are outgoings to consider for the event. You'll need a network switch, cables, refreshments, prizes and a location. The most expensive item is undoubtedly going to be the venue, so you need to either accrue money in advance for this, or pay for it out of your own pocket. Granting slight discounts for early-registering players often gets the money in quickly and can really help your budget – or help pay for the overdraft. Make it as easy as possible for people to pay you too: I use PayPal, NoChex, credit or debit cards and even cheque payments.



## THE LAN SCENE

**7** You need to be advertising anywhere and everywhere you can. Obviously, you won't be paying the Saatchis to organise a TV commercial, but you can get a lot for nothing on the Internet. There are a few Web rings and LAN lists which you can add yourself to without much difficulty – [www.lanparty.com](http://www.lanparty.com) lists hundreds of global events, while [www.uklans.com](http://www.uklans.com) has UK-only gamers meaning you'll be competing with fewer rivals. List your site in as many places as you can and plan ahead to give people time to prepare. Be sure to mention your website address for any added information you can provide.

## THE PREPARATION

**10** Always plan the event in advance. Get games, patches and mods installed on a server. Find out how many players are required for a decent game (minimum and maximum). Try to chat up sponsors to give you exclusives – you'll find this easier if you can explain what publicity you can offer. Everybody wants exposure and sponsors can expect some sales as a result of them handing out free stuff at larger events – the last GGLan had copies of *Savage* a week before the UK release. Even late-breaking demos will go down a treat – especially if they're massive downloads and only due out the day before your LAN.





## COMMUNITY CHEST

## CALL OF DUTY

**With numerous mods, skins and patches around, Daniel Emery selects the elite troops**

"They don't like it up them." Fortunately for Lance Corporal Jones, the Walmington-On-Sea Home Guard from *Dad's Army* never encountered the 1st Jagr Homosexual Panzer Brigade – or the war could have been very different.

*Call Of Duty* is of a more serious bent, borrowing heavily from some of the recent Hollywood WWII blockbusters – *Saving Private Ryan*, *Enemy At The Gates*, *Band Of Brothers* – and combining them into a FPS sandwich with lashings of violence sauce. And because it uses the *Quake 3* engine, the sky's the limit when it comes to messing about with the code. Here's our top eight...



#### CALL OF DUTY FILES (WEBSITE)

[www.codfiles.com](http://www.codfiles.com)

If you're feeling lazy, then this site is a one-stop shop for everything *Call Of Duty*-related. There are official patches, along with a good selection of maps and links to the latest updates and mods. There are even custom wallpapers and new audio files if you really want to take it to the nth degree...



#### MERCILESS BLOOD (MOD)

[merciless.callofdutygaming.com](http://merciless.callofdutygaming.com)

If you like your gaming gritty and hardcore, this is the mod for you – with blood splatters, sprayed walls and body parts galore. You can also run it alongside other mods, although 100 per cent stability isn't guaranteed – but when is it with a PC game?



#### CALL OF DUTY MAPS (MAPS)

[codmaps.uni.cc](http://codmaps.uni.cc)

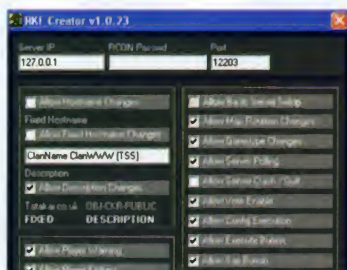
Does exactly what it says on the tin. At the time of going to press, the database had over 120 maps available for download and the number grows daily. There are also reasonable screenshots of each map, so you're not tied into bulky downloads just to get the one you want.



#### MODS ONLINE (MODS)

[www.modsonline.com](http://www.modsonline.com)

*Quadrophonia* fans may find this site a disappointment, but for the rest of us it's a great resource for some of the more unusual *Call Of Duty* mods – such as modifying the splash screen. Some people have even taken photographs of real guns and used them as replacement skins. We're officially scared...



#### CODADMIN (UTILITY)

[www.codadmin.com/nuke](http://www.codadmin.com/nuke)

CoDadmin.com is a website devoted to helping server admins set up, maintain and run a successful *Call Of Duty* game server. You'll find guides, admin tools, server-side mods and a lot of help from other admins here. You'll also find essential server utilities, such as ServerScan 2.0.2.



#### PLANET CALL OF DUTY (WEBSITE)

[www.planetcallofduty.com](http://www.planetcallofduty.com)

The granddaddy of mod sites – it's been around since early *Quake* days and is still going strong, despite fierce competition. Not only is it a Mecca for *Call Of Duty* resources, it also has an almost daily news update on future mods, developer info and feedback from the map-making community. Smart.



#### SWAT TC (TOTAL CONVERSION)

[swat.codfiles.com](http://swat.codfiles.com)

Based on the modern-day SWAT teams in the US, this is similar to *Counter-Strike* or *Tactical Ops*. The mod is multiplayer but it hasn't been decided whether a single-player/co-op mode will be implemented. However, there will be at least 24 weapons based on what real life SWAT teams use today.



#### EASTERN FRONT (TOTAL CONVERSION)

[efcodmod.com/site](http://efcodmod.com/site)

Taking the Eastern Front missions of *COD* to an almost anal level of detail, *EF*'s new weapons, limitations on weight, character classes and huge maps recreate the battles on the Russian steppes. An ammo limit puts an end to grenade spammers, although you can re-arm at supply depots and ammunition lorries.



# STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill is going underground  
in *PlanetSide: Core Combat*

**IN THE** future, war will be fought on computers. We're living in the future, and war is upon us. We are the 58th Marine Corps, and I am the special guest for the night. The chaps have been briefed and have waited patiently for my arrival. I am MajorSpiffing and I am a behemoth: a lumbering hulk of metal with enough firepower to flatten a city. Transformers? I've shit 'em.

Having loaded up on guns and ammo, online editor Prezzer leads me towards the muster point. Due to my huge bulk, I begin to lag behind. It's annoying, but it does afford me a perfect view of the low-flying aircraft that beheads my colleague. The first casualty of war is Prezzer, and it's an unsettling experience, leaving me floundering and alone.

Through the magic of games he soon reappears though, and we meet up with the platoon. Troops have gathered from far and wide, and there's an uncommon sense of

**"It feels a bit like the first day at school – we even line up for a photo before heading off"**

excitement. Rather than terrified soldiers being sent to die in a foreign cave, it's more like we're about to set off on some kind of jolly boys outing. Amazingly, people seem pleased to see me and I'm treated like a guest of honour. Before waving me off, Prezzer shows me how to get into a buggy, and the driver, DooMerPS, proudly tells everyone that he's carrying the *PC ZONE* writer.

## SCHOOL'S OUT

It feels a bit like the first day at a new school, and everyone even lines up for a photo before heading off to meet our fate. And while Prezzer may have pissed off home, I'm joined by a couple of familiar *ZONE* faces in the shape of Anthony and art boy Jamie, aka BrigadeerMcGrumble.

For the uninitiated, *Core Combat* is an add-on pack for *PlanetSide*, with the key difference being that the action takes place in a series of underground caverns. How anyone thought this was a good idea is something of a mystery, as in my experience, spending time in caves is generally a drab affair. The journey there is reasonably exciting though, as we take to the air in a series of giant buggy carriers.

On reaching the cave, everyone

piles out and performs a passable impression of a headless chicken. It's never really certain who, if anyone, is in charge, and it's probably just as well that there's no enemy here. Somehow, someone manages to establish order and we regroup and set off for another cave. It's a similar story here though, and it's turning into an unruly school trip, with soldiers resorting to bellowing insults down the caverns for fun.

## CHASE ME

I'm still the belle of the ball and there's no shortage of suitors, with both DooMerPS and Grendel urging me to follow them. I spend time trailing each of them, with equally fruitless results in terms of finding an enemy. With my trigger finger becoming increasingly itchy, I loose off a few shots into the air. BrigadeerMcGrumble announces: "Killed by Steve!" It appears that I have accidentally slain Jamie. At least it gives me a chance to try out the voice commands, as

I shout "sorry!" to the grumbling Scotsman.

An hour has passed with no sign of conflict and the game seems to largely consist of travelling around on yellow beams of light, like some futuristic Stannah chairlift. Everyone is trying to show me a good time, but a few take umbrage when I describe it as "a big gay chatroom".

To compound the misery, I've also acquired a stalker, namely Debtcollector, who keeps badgering me for a private conversation. I finally relinquish, only for him to reel off a list of names that he wants me to mention in the magazine. What is this, a request show?

## BUFFALO SOLDIERS

Everyone knows war is hell, but peace is decidedly boring. At one stage, Grendel asks if I "want a knife fight" just to liven

things up. However, rumours of a sighted enemy persist and I head in the general direction reported. Finally, I spot a foe, the crosshair turning red as I prepare to unleash my arsenal. Click. Nothing. Nothing but the sickening sound of an empty weapon. I appear to have loosed off all my ammo into the scenery out of sheer boredom, and death is swift and undignified.

Respawning into a barren area, I clamber across the rocks alone, but my bulk drags me down. Out of desperation, I repeatedly shout for help, but to no avail. Increasingly losing patience, respite comes in the form of a phone call, and I'm forced to bid my platoon farewell as the missus is "on her way home with a bag of chips".

I'm stuck in a rut crying for help. And I didn't even get the chips. [X]



"OK kids, hold hands and form a crocodile..."



"Enemy near! Or is that Jamie?"







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# HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

## MR TELEPHONE MAN



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ Say, anyone remember Trimphones? Trendy things from the '60s and '70s, they adorned the halls of fashionable homes and *Dr Who* sets throughout the Jon Pertwee and Tom Baker eras. I recently found one in my loft and realised it was one of the ugliest things I'd ever seen. Trust me, you wouldn't want it on show in your hallway.

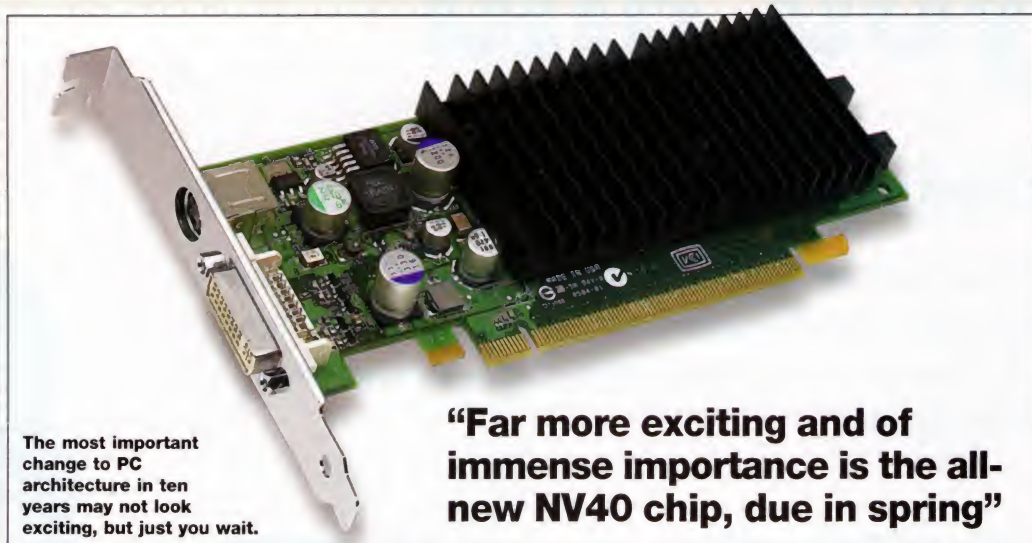
Now cast your mind back to the white Testarossa that Crockett and Tubbs made their own in *Miami Vice*. As with their wardrobe and coiffure, the wedge-shaped Ferrari was implausibly stylish. Every schoolboy in the land bought a poster and stared longingly at the car, dreaming of the day they too would flash around city streets in pursuit of bad guys. If that

schoolboy was you, have a look at a white Testarossa now and see just how naff it is. You wouldn't even want to be seen walking beside it.

Time is ruthless with our fondest memories.

Except, I've found, when it comes to computers. Take the old Chase HQ cabinet in my garage, which even today elicits appreciative gasps from anyone of my generation. And despite its total processing capability, Wendy Towers still shakes to the sound of *Total Annihilation*, *Half-Life*, *Atomic Bomberman*, *Red Alert*, *Doom* and various other oldies.

It means that when I get a letter from someone whose budget won't stretch to any of the expensive toys on these pages, I can tell them honestly that they don't need money to have fun on your PC. Every one of the titles I just mentioned has a multiplayer mode, and none of them will kick up a fuss when run on an old Pentium. Most importantly, everyone will be able to relive their time with *Duke Nukem*. A distant memory perhaps, but unlike so many things, time has yet to catch up with the great man. He was and always will be the coolest character ever to grace a screen.



The most important change to PC architecture in ten years may not look exciting, but just you wait.

**"Far more exciting and of immense importance is the all-new NV40 chip, due in spring"**

## THE CONGESTION-FREE EXPRESSWAY

**ATI claims PCI Express is the most significant update to PC architecture in a decade. But what does it all mean for you?**

**VERY SOON NOW**, PCI and AGP slots will start to disappear and distinctive PCI Express connectors will take their place. The change won't happen overnight, and motherboard manufacturers will offer a smorgasbord of technologies for at least the next 12 months, but the way ahead is clear.

Since its launch more than ten years ago, Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) specifications have improved only a little, jumping 33MHz to a heady 66MHz in 1995. When you consider that processor speeds have gone from 33MHz to 3.4GHz over the same period, you'll soon see why PCI has become something of a millstone around the neck of performance. Aside from today's processors huffing and barfing huge amounts of data, multimedia applications which deal with high-definition video and audio have highlighted how PCI simply isn't cut out for this kind of stuff. Even the latest networking technologies can monopolise pretty much all the bandwidth inside your PC.

### GRAPHICALLY SPEAKING

And then of course there's dear old AGP. Despite appearing just 18 months ago and with a transfer rate of 3.1GB/sec, the Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) is heading the way of the dodo as well. Crucially, a look at the roadmaps of key chipset manufacturers such as Intel and SIS reveals that AGP 8x is being dropped

as of now and that PCI Express x16 will take its place (the x16 designation refers to the number of 'lanes' carrying data to and from the interface – more lanes, more traffic). Additionally, the new x16 slot will provide up to 60W of power to cards pushed into it, allowing for some serious graphical processing engines. Chances are that with this much electricity around, the connector will need cooling too.

### INTO THE FUTURE

The fact the biggest names are moving wholesale to PCI Express means that video card manufacturers must be fairly prompt in adopting the new standard. NVIDIA has already announced GeForce PCX, a range of cards based on existing FX technology but with a PCI Express x16 interface. However, ATI has been keen to point out that NVIDIA's 'new' PCX range uses a bridge device to join old and new technologies, and that its hardware

will use the 8GB/sec bus natively. It's even possible that a GeForce PCX card will be slower than its AGP equivalent.

Of course, GeForce PCX is little more than a ruse allowing NVIDIA to tout existing products as PCI Express 'world firsts'. Far more exciting and of immense importance is its all-new NV40 chip, due out later this spring and available with a native PCI Express interface. Rumours abound that it will feature 16 rendering pipelines and over 200-million transistors. Compare these numbers with ATI's rival R423 chip, due around the same time with eight pipelines and around 160 million transistors and also offering twice the performance of what we're used to now. If such specifications hold true, and we believe NVIDIA's hints about markedly quicker pixel shader performance, it looks like NVIDIA could have a major advantage over its Canadian counterparts. Only time – and benchmarks – will tell.

### THINKING OF AN UPGRADE?

If you're thinking of upgrading your PC later this year – and from the letters I receive it would appear that many of you are – don't get bogged down in all the terminology. Don't worry about how it works, just be excited that it does. Understand that if you buy a new machine tomorrow, the technology inside it is probably a dead end, and upcoming products from NVIDIA, ATI and others will only reinforce that. Wait around for a month or two and then seek out a motherboard with PCI Express and a video card with a native PCI Express interface. Then you'll be halfway to having a serious gaming machine.





#### REVIEWS

Lan Pirates' Buccaneer beckons



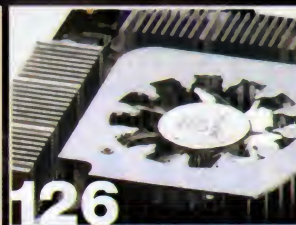
#### REVIEWS

Amazing new graphics cards



#### DEAR WANDY

Solutions 'R' Us at Wandy HQ



#### BUYER'S GUIDE

Born to shop? Start here...

# USB Tidies Up Its Act

Intel reveals plans for a secure, wire-free version of hi-speed USB with 480MB/sec on tap

**INTEL HAS RECENTLY** announced the Wireless USB standard, WUSB. Although you can only expect specifications rather than boxed up products this year, the mere prospect should be enough to get every wire-free fan all charged up and emotional.

If you've already adopted wireless technology, be it in the form of peripherals or broadband routers, you'll be all too aware of its benefits. Like ditching a monster CRT for a low-profile LCD, you suddenly realise that the chaos in your room was almost entirely down to the PC. There's the mouse and keyboard, network, audio in and audio out (not to mention up to seven further cables for surround speakers), plus serial cables, parallel cables, USB and more. WUSB aims not only to be secure, but also to do away with much of the clutter. It plans to turn your machine into a 480MB/sec host to which 127 clients up to ten metres distant can connect to.

WUSB will also offer device-to-device connectivity, much like Bluetooth does at the moment. And yes, what of Bluetooth? Once upon a time, Intel was its biggest proponent, but with this recent announcement it looks as though the standard has been leapfrogged. Bluetooth offers 1MB/sec, which is simply not good enough for modern devices and nobody understands it anyway. In contrast, PC buyers have a good grasp of USB and Wireless USB should be no different. In addition, its high bandwidth will enable it to play a central role in digital home networking, connecting everything from your camera to your television.

There is one hurdle though: power. The majority of USB devices on my desk require power and until someone can figure out a way of harmlessly transmitting an electric current across the airwaves, it means each WUSB device will require its own power in the form of rechargeable batteries or a plug-in adaptor.



**You've probably noticed that USB is everywhere, from printers to pens. Its mass acceptance will ensure that Wireless USBs triumph over competing technologies.**

**"If you've already adopted wireless technology - in the form of peripherals or broadband routers - you'll be all too aware of its benefits"**

#### SNIPPETS

##### XBOX2 GOES SOFT



Microsoft has made it known that the Xbox2, slated for launch some time next year, will no longer feature an integral hard drive. In the month preceding this announcement, M-Systems entered into an agreement to supply hardware for forthcoming console products. The company makes flash disks - slices of silicon which store data in a similar way to a hard drive - but they're small, silent and have no moving parts. They appear to the OS as hard drives, but they're more rugged.

##### YOU'RE SURROUNDED



Creative has announced its DTS-100 Decoder and Inspire 7.1 TD7700 speakers designed for multi-environment 7.1 surround sound. As well as upmixing a stereo input to six and seven channels, the £120 decoder can pass through 7.1 audio from your PC. Plus, with support for Dolby Digital EX, DTS-ES, Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS NEO:6, as well as four digital and three analogue sources, it fills your head with some serious positional audio. The £230 speakers are Creative's most pricey yet and offer a serious gaming solution. [europe.creative.com](http://europe.creative.com)

##### PROPHET OFF



Sadly, it looks as though classical mythology was wrong about Hercules being immortal. Guillemot Corporation (the company behind the Hercules brand) has succumbed to the pressures of the cut-throat video card market and ceased production of its video cards and ProphetView monitors. Hercules owners need not worry, as the company has promised to honour all warranty and support obligations. For now, Hercules graphics cards remain on sale in the UK (including the 9800SE All-in-Wonder), but its distinctive flat screens have sold out. [europe.hercules.com](http://europe.hercules.com)

## REGET

The world's best download manager

I've been a user of GoZilla for years. It was the first 'download manager', enabling you to queue your downloads, throttle their arrival and resume when the connection dropped - modem users will find a download manager is indispensable. While the principles are the same, the technology has moved on a little since then and ReGet Deluxe is the best product of its type, eclipsing rivals such as GetRight. There are too many features to list here, but it's my favoured download manager - I've even managed to convince a couple of GetRight stalwarts to swap. [www.reget.com](http://www.reget.com)

## DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

#### MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Software Installation Utility	5.1.1.1002	12 Dec 03	1.4MB	<a href="http://support.intel.com">support.intel.com</a>
NVIDIA	Forceware	3.13	3 Nov 03	12.9MB	<a href="http://www.nvidia.com">www.nvidia.com</a>
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.96 Beta	4 Feb 04	2.25MB	<a href="http://www.viaarena.com">www.viaarena.com</a>

#### GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.2	12-Feb-04	23.8MB	<a href="http://www.ati.com">www.ati.com</a>
NVIDIA	Forceware	53.03	09-Dec-03	8.5MB	<a href="http://www.nvidia.com">www.nvidia.com</a>

#### SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADVANCED HD Update	EAX4DRV	19 Nov 03	13.8MB	<a href="http://uk.europe.creative.com">uk.europe.creative.com</a>
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0051	06 Oct 03	10.1MB	<a href="http://m-audio.com">m-audio.com</a>



# BUCCANEER 3.4GHZ

■ Price: £2,099 | Manufacturer: Lan Pirates | Phone: 01926 745609 | [www.lanpirates.com](http://www.lanpirates.com)

**You've seen the adverts, but what about the booty?**

DESKTOP PC

**AVAST!** A square-rigged silver vessel, large and grand! Splice the main brace, haul some wind and carry about the sweet trade! No, I'm sorry, I absolutely refuse to talk like a pirate. Not only does it require too many exclamation marks for comfortable reading, but it's about as funny as having a 30ft yardarm rammed into your bilge hole. If you want to engage in nautical banter, you'll have to wait for International Talk Like a Pirate Day, otherwise known as September 19, when the Internet fills up with people talking about damp coves, huge chests and pearl necklaces. No, wait, everyone's doing that already. It's when people stop talking about porn and go on about buried treasure and doubloons instead – my mistake.

## UNDER FULL SAIL

Lan Pirates' desktop systems come in three flavours: the entry-level 2.8GHz Privateer at £1,099, the 3.0GHz Corsair at £1,449, and this, the more heavily-laden Buccaneer, which bends the weighbridge at more than two grand.

It features a 3.4GHz P4 on Intel's high-performance D875PBZ mobo (the Area-51 reviewed late last year also featured this board). There's also 1GB DDR400 RAM, MSI GeForce FX 5900 Ultra, 160GB SATA drive, CD-RW and DVD multi-rewriter and Audigy 2 ZS, together with some weighty Logitech peripherals and Creative T7700 speakers.

The Buccaneer creates an impressive wake. As is common with Intel boards, overclocking is pretty much out of the question (if you must tinker, messing

about with GPU speeds is the only option open to you). However, in place of fiddle-friendliness is good old-fashioned stability and low-down grunt from some big numbers. In synthetic tests, the 3.4-litre system trails the Dell Dimension, but is back on the pace in pure gaming benchmarks. It's also handsomely quick in loading and playing *Far Cry* and *Desert Combat* – two of the most

demanding real-world assessments – where the Dell (with half the RAM onboard) plainly flounders. Alongside the Dimension or ZONE's 3.06GHz test bench, the Lan Pirates machine does make rather good headway.

## PRICED OUT

I went and found PCs of a similar specification from Dell, Demonite, Special Reserve and

**"Try as I might, I couldn't fathom how the Buccaneer reached its lofty price tag"**

Alienware, but try as I might I couldn't quite fathom how the Buccaneer reached its lofty price tag. Especially when you consider that last month's Dell Dimension breathes down its neck in the benchmarks, punches a £300 smaller hole in your pocket and comes bundled with an LCD the size of a Buckingham Palace sash window. What's more, a near-identical machine from Special Reserve costs £1,499. All things considered, I'm left scratching my head – it doesn't add up.

I feel quite sheepish marking down what is essentially a perfectly decent bit of kit, but the Buccaneer really doesn't make sense at this price – the guys at Lan Pirates must keep an eye on the competition and will know that my observation is a fair and well-founded one. If its flagship product were 20 per cent cheaper, it would almost certainly make the grade. However, until it does something murderous to its price list, the Privateer and Corsair make a more judicious choice. **PCZ**

## POWER TO THE GAMERS



Falcon Northwest, the company that started it all.

## POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Although personal computer gamers have been around since the first personal computer, dedicated gaming machines have been somewhat thin on the ground in this country. While American customers were buying 'recreational hardware' back in the mid-90s (one of the pioneers of the sector, Falcon Northwest, started life 12 years ago), British consumers were getting excited about the fact their Packard Bell came with colour-coded speakers and a three-button mouse.

It's only a recent development that's meant we can configure a PC whose sole purpose is to play games, and there's now a steadily increasing number of manufacturers muscling in on this market. From household names like Alienware to smaller and arguably keener outfits like Lan Pirates, specialists now offer a good assortment of systems oriented towards anyone with a hunger for fun, which is good news.

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Understated styling
- ✓ Enough grunt for gaming
- ✗ That price tag
- ✗ A little raucous

# 76

**At a sensible price, the Buccaneer would be a sensible buy**

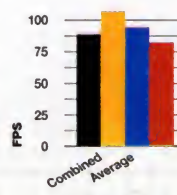
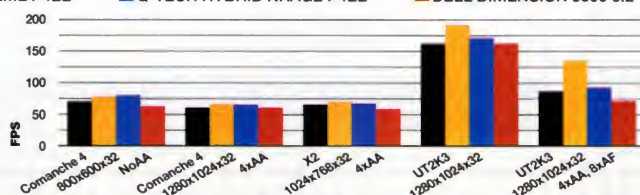
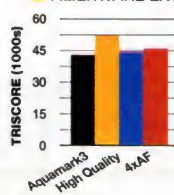
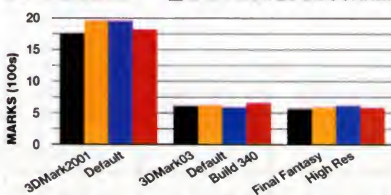
## BENCHMARKS

■ LAN PIRATES BUCCANEER

■ ALIENWARE EXTREME P4EE

■ Q-TECH HYBRID N Rage P4EE

■ DELL DIMENSION 8300 3.2







**ALIENWARE**  
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**"The benchmarks speak for themselves - You want it!"**

- PC Zone UK, January 2004

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# SPARKLE 5900 XT

■ £139 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: 0191 4210 166 | [www.sparkle-technology.co.uk](http://www.sparkle-technology.co.uk)

**Big frame rate, small price tag. We like...**

ATI used to be king of the mid-range, with cards like the Radeon 9500 Pro (a short-lived but delightfully mental card) and its 9600 Pro successor, which was way out in front of the FX 5600 on value. The 9600XT looked set to be another nail in the GeForce coffin, but NVIDIA suddenly pulled out the 5700 Ultra which was priced to match the 9600 but went faster (who can argue with that)?

This is the encore – NVIDIA's nicked the XT moniker, taken some of its existing high-end technology and stuck a silly price sticker on it. Say hello to

the 5900 XT, the fastest £140 video card ever made.

You can find it in a variety of guises, sometimes without the XT branding, but if you spy a 5900 badge from just under £140-£160, you'll know what you're looking at. In actuality, it's nothing more exciting than a plain 5900 with slower memory, but the benchmarks are a dead ringer for the original, a card that would have cost you close to 300-quid nine months ago.

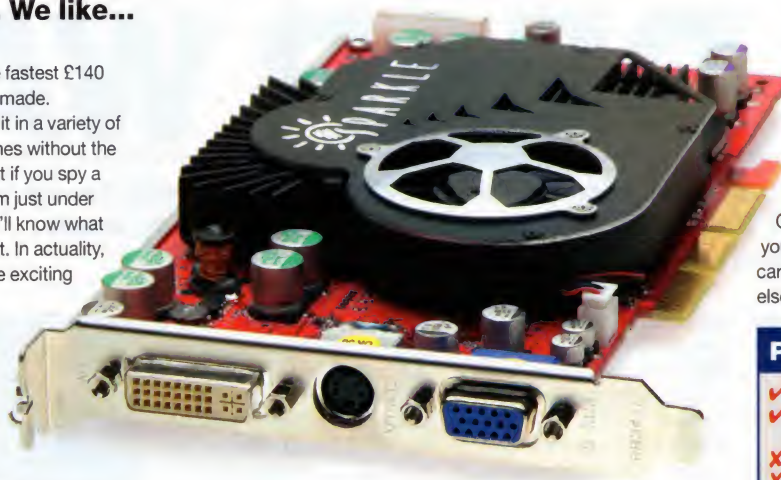
I borrowed two same-model cards for test because the results from XTs are many and varied. In the Sparkle, the memory isn't wound quite so tightly as in the XFX, and it trails

in the benchmarks – not by much mind you, but enough to put a dent in its score. And while the Sparkle is down on freebie CDs, it's constructed to an obviously higher standard – a metal brace runs along the card's top edge. On the scales,

the Sparkle is 25 per cent heavier than the XFX. Plus, the memory's cooling sinks are integrated neatly with the fan assembly.

So should you go with the Sparkle or with XFX? The latter gets the nod for the way it goes –

let's not kid ourselves here, performance is key to a card's success. However, at only £4 less, the Sparkle is right up there too. Whichever GeForce XT you choose, you'll be buying an amazing card that outguns everything else at the same money.



## SPECIFICATIONS

**HARDWARE** 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900 XT  
**ANCILLARIES** 1 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable, Power splitter  
**BUNDLE** Installation CD

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Big on value, top drawer quality
- ✓ 40 per cent faster than the 9600XT
- ✗ Trails the XFX slightly on oomph
- ✗ Slightly anaemic bundle

# 90

**NVIDIA wins again. Who'd have thought it?**

# XFX 5900 XT

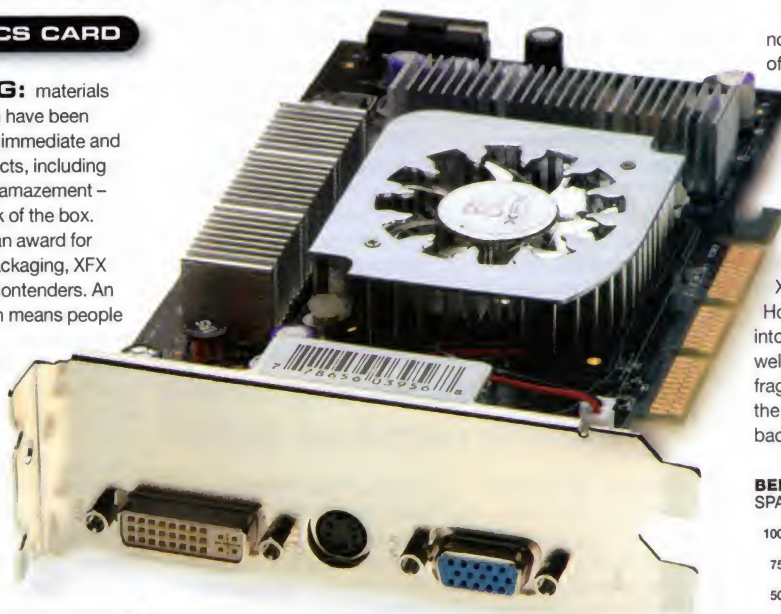
■ £143 | Manufacturer: XFX Graphics | Phone: N/A | [www.xfxforce.co.uk](http://www.xfxforce.co.uk)

**A new mid-range speed king, and our new Editor's Choice**

## GRAPHICS CARD

**WARNING:** materials contained within have been known to cause immediate and serious side effects, including excitement and amazement – so says the back of the box.

If there was an award for unusual retail packaging, XFX would have no contenders. An X-shaped carton means people pluck it from computer store shelves out of sheer curiosity, and its carbon fibre-patterned top and slick cartoon front make it an intriguing and instantly



## SPECIFICATIONS

**HARDWARE** 128MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900 XT  
**ANCILLARIES** 1 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable  
**BUNDLE** Comanche 4, Ghost Recon, Racing Simulator 3, Moto GP 2, XFX Games Collection CD, Installation CD

recognisable sight. What's more, perhaps uniquely, the contents actually live up to the hype.

The XFX card creeps ahead of its Sparkle rival in every benchmark test thanks to 100MHz faster memory, and chalks up the biggest

Wandymark (frame rates per pound) score yet seen.

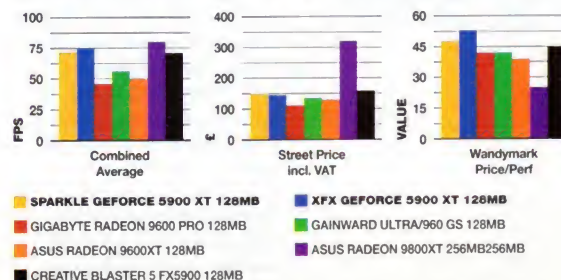
Put simply, it's the best value video card available. Over 14,000 marks in 3DMark2001, 5,500 in 3DMark03 and 37,000 marks in AquaMark3 means it's

not that far off the power of an old 9800 Pro.

As you might expect, there are some trade-offs. The card's dull to look at – the exterior packaging is more exciting – and is of a plainly lesser quality. This shouldn't deter you though if you're interested in the XFX's class-leading power. However, if you're seriously into case modding, you may well be deterred by an oddly fragile appearance and by the unnecessary double-width back plate.

## BENCHMARKS

SPARKLE GEFORCE 5900 XT 128MB AND XFX GEFORCE 5900 XT 128MB



The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK** is the combined average score divided by the price.



In the end though, that's all there is to fault. The bundle is superb, the performance is unquestionable and the price is as silly as the company's marketing. Dangerously reactive material may cause spontaneous screaming of 'XFX Rules!' You know, I think they might be right...

## PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Unbeatable value & performance
- ✓ Retail packaging and bundle
- ✗ Renders a PCI slot useless
- ✗ Looks dull and cheap

# 92

**At this price, nothing comes close**





# DEAR WANDY

**Computer driving you to violence? Software out of control? Hardware not heeding your pleading cry? Then write in for expert PC advice. No job too small...**

■ **OVERCLOCKER'S FRIEND** Phil Wand

## LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

**Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE,** Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallingington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ.

**Email** Address your letters to us at [wandy@dearwandy.com](mailto:wandy@dearwandy.com) with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

## CONDUCTOR COWBOY

**Q** I've recently upgraded my computer to an Asus A7N8X, AMD 2800+ Barton, Geforce4 Ti4600, 1GB RAM, Maxtor and Seagate hard drives, plus an Audigy2. Five minutes or so into a game I get hit with a random restart. This is a real problem because my *Counter-Strike* clan is getting rather angry. On rebooting it says: 'No 80-conductor installed.' I've tried replacing the cables with other cables I have, and I'm sure they're 80-pin. This hasn't sorted the problem and my computer still randomly restarts.

*David Fenwick*

**A** If you've used cables that you've had kicking around since way back, there's a high chance they're the old 40-conductor design.

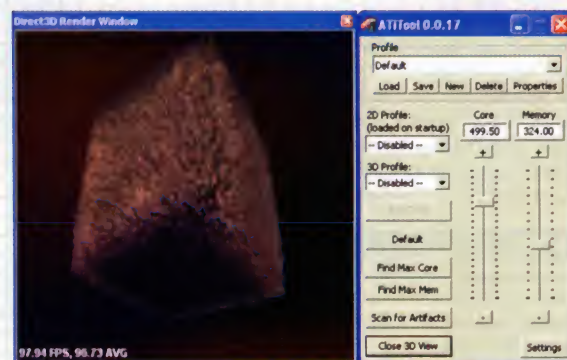
This prehistoric layout can prove troublesome for unwary PC builders, as its 40-pin connector is identical to the new 80-conductor cables required for modern hard drives. In short, it's easy to unwittingly plug the old cable into a new drive, and if you do so, the integrity of the signal travelling along it will be greatly compromised. The 80-conductors provide additional grounding and stop crosstalk between the wires; without them, all manner of weird things can happen. The error message you're seeing means you'll need to go and buy a new 80-conductor ATA100 cable rather than rummaging around in the discard pile. You'll probably find that your PC's strange behaviour will stop around the same time.

## CRANK THE CLOCK

**Q** I've recently purchased a Hercules 3D Prophet 9800SE and have successfully softmodded it. I'm now tweaking my CMOS settings to try and get the most out of it, but while my motherboard manual is helpful, it doesn't tell me which settings would be best. Could you please give me advice with regards to DRAM and AGP settings in the Advanced Chipset Features? My PC specs are MSI K7T266 Pro2-u, Athlon XP1700+, 256MB PC2100 RAM, 30GB ATA 133HD. Also, how much improvement in gameplay will I see if I upgrade to an 8X AGP motherboard considering there are decent-looking boards on the market for £50-£70?

*M Thomas*

**A** To start with, you're looking in the wrong place to turn up the wick on your video card. Leave the BIOS settings at their defaults and pin the AGP aperture size at 128MB. There may be a slight performance gain from upping this setting to 256MB, but there's an equal chance you'll suffer a slight degradation instead. There's no hard and fast rule on this,



**ATI Tool, from the guy who brought you all the softmods. It's easily the best tool of its type.**

you've been thrashing around in the dark and hitting all the wrong switches.

Gamers these days are bombarded by information that tells them they need to overclock, and overclock NOW! Online communities regularly espouse the practice, as though leaving hardware as the factory intended is a misdemeanour. Their articles, which often sprawl across Web pages like a badger across a dual carriageway, cover a hundred benchmarks and present exciting conclusions. They go into tedious detail about motherboard revisions and

registry hack which opens up the clock frequency adjuster within NVIDIA's standard control panel.

## ALL IN WOBBLY

**Q** Just a word of warning about softmodding the 9800SE All-In-Wonder. My brand-new card failed to mod – with both the omega drivers and W1zzard's drivers. Without the mod, the card is a donkey from a gaming perspective – there are much better ways to spend £170. Luckily, my understanding retailer took the card back and exchanged it for an MSI K7N2 DELTA and a 2600+ Athlon – excellent customer service, thank you PC World! Readers should remember (as indeed you warned them initially) that the 9800SE is neutered for a reason, usually linked to its performance. I hear the softmodding success rate of the card is only around 20 per cent, much lower than for previous Radeons. My advice to gamers with £170 to spend is not to risk the mod, but wait until March or get an old 9700 Pro if you can. Don't spend your money on a duff card.

*Stalin*

**"These days, gamers are bombarded with info telling them to overclock NOW!"**

but experience tells me that you won't need to touch it.

As for jumping to 8X AGP, you'll not notice a thing. You should be saving for your very first PCI Express motherboard rather than throwing cash at yesterday's technology, so screw up that shopping list and keep what you've got for the moment.

Now let's get back to the issue of upping the output from your 9800SE. In all honesty, I'm not surprised that

ambient temperatures, but rarely explain how they managed to get a credit card number frame-rate out of an old GeForce2. The assumption is that everyone knows the secret, and the results are what counts. Fear not.

Radeon owners should take a look at ATI Tool from [atitool.ocfaq.com](http://atitool.ocfaq.com) and GeForce owners should search [www.dearwandy.com](http://www.dearwandy.com) for the word 'coolbits'. This should lead you to a small

**A** As you stated, I never made any promises and was clear that the softmod may not work. All 3D Prophet cards in the 9800 range start out as fully-fledged monsters,



**Not all IDE cables are created equal. An old 40-conductor ribbon is bad for modern drives.**



## "Beware though, because some motherboards are finicky on the mix you choose and some memory chips won't tolerate foolhardiness"

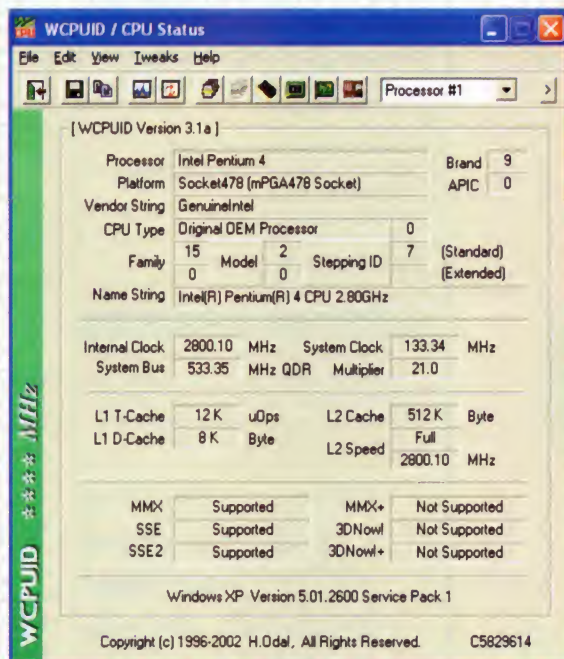
but are demoted depending on whether they pass or fail certain tests at the end of the production process. Yet people tend to forget that not all lower rank cards have flunked an exam, and many are artificially throttled simply to keep up with the high demand for lower-priced kit.

In your case, I think you were unfortunate and got landed with a genuine dunce, and it was a stroke of luck that PC World allowed you to swap it for other gear. I'm not sure where the 20 per cent success rate you mentioned comes from – I've seen it elsewhere and I don't go along with it. The ever-present poll on the homepage for Wizzard's softmod shows that well over half of all users have managed to transform their 9800SEs without artefacts – including me – and only a small minority report total failure (such as not even booting Windows).

As yours is the first letter I've received that says that the drivers didn't work, my opinion hasn't changed. As I said, I think you were unlucky; an exception rather than the rule. That said, if you were reading last month, you'll have noticed that Hercules is clocking its 9800SE cards much lower than before, making the standard, unmodded version rather undesirable. So now, I'd go along with you in saying that a used 9700 Pro is the safer bet – try [www.ebay.co.uk](http://www.ebay.co.uk).

### NF7 UNDERGROUND

**Q** I have a reasonably fast machine with a GeForce FX 5950 Ultra and Athlon 3000+, but I experience a certain amount of slowdowns when I'm playing games. Formatting my hard drive helped, but I'd love to try overclocking. Would you recommend it? Would you be able to give me a few pointers on how I can do it or tell me if it's worth it? Also, I have a Creative Audigy2 connected to my NF7-S



WCPUID is a neat utility which shows system bus and multiplier information at the Windows desktop.

board and experience slight stutters and crackling at times in games, most noticeably the *Far Cry* demo. I've heard it a number of times before – and the graphics pause for a split second too. If you could answer my questions, I'd be grateful.

*Dion Lloyd*

**A** Although it's a daunting subject, the idea behind overclocking is rather simple one: frontside bus x multiplier = speed. If you use your AMD engine as an example, its FSB clock of 166MHz has a 13 multiplier, giving a product of 2.17GHz. To increase this speed, and hopefully to pump up the results in benchmarks and games, tweak the FSB and multiplier in your BIOS using small increments.

For example, a 200MHz frontside bus with a 13x multiplier gives you 2.6GHz, representing a 430MHz gain. Beware though, because some motherboards are finicky on the exact mix you choose and some memory chips won't tolerate foolhardiness – your existing

166MHz RAM will need upgrading before you attempt any heroics.

You'll also need to take a closer look at cooling, as if you end up changing voltages to support much higher speeds, you're going to be pushing out more heat. It's also at this point I should stress there's a high chance you can lock yourself out of your machine if you don't know what you're doing (indeed, early revision NF7-S boards are prone to slamming the door in your face). To get the most from the experience, visit [www.dearwandy.com](http://www.dearwandy.com) and we'll go through it with you.

Regarding the problem with the Audigy2, there are a fair few reports of the same symptoms from other NVIDIA owners, and as a first step I'd suggest you remove all the silly bollocks that comes with Creative cards – you don't need it – and try a 'drivers only' install from the CD-ROM. If that doesn't work, try putting the Audigy in another PCI slot, and change the PCI Latency Timer in your BIOS. I'd also want to try rolling back your

## QUICKIES ARE GOOD FOR YOU

### STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

**Q** I want a new graphics card to give my old system a boost. I have a GeForce3 Ti200 but that can't cope with *X2: The Threat*. I thought about buying a GeForce4 Ti4800, but it turned out to be slower than the Ti4600. I looked at the Radeon 9700, but like the Ti4600, it isn't made anymore. Can I use a GeForce FX? I'm guessing not, since I only have 4X AGP and a 350W PSU.

*Michael Harris*

**A** Good news – you can run an 8X card in a 4X slot. A GeForce FX 5900 XT will do you nicely in this respect (see our review on page 118). As long as you're not stressing your power supply with multiple hard drives, CD burners and a long chain of USB devices, the 350W should be okay.

**Q** I've upgraded to XP Pro and have brightness problems – I have a Packard Bell A726 monitor and a Ti200. The brightness and contrast settings are on maximum, but all my games remain dark. Any game without a gamma setting is unplayable and many games don't have this option. I tried the previous driver for the card but this makes no difference, and neither does the latest driver for my monitor. Desktop brightness is fine.

*Ian*

**A** I had a Ti200 when they were new and cool and had exactly this problem. There are a few things you can try, starting with someone else's monitor (you say the desktop is fine, but it's always worth double-checking). Failing that, juggle your video settings in games which enable you to do so – from OpenGL to Direct3D, from 16-bit to 32-bit and vice versa. You could also try rolling back the driver to a much earlier version. And if you're still plunged into darkness, visit [www.entechtaiwan.net](http://www.entechtaiwan.net) and download PowerStrip, which could well save the day. After that I'm out of ideas. Anyone else?

**Q** I'm considering buying an Alienware PC. Having looked at the product range, I can't decide between the AMD Aurora or Pentium Area 51. Can you explain the pros and cons of each, with particular reference to 64-bit technology? I want a PC that will cope with everything the games industry has to offer over the next two to three years.

*Geoff Blue*

**A** There's too much going on this year for anyone to buy a PC and still be happy with it in the autumn. AMD moved the 64-bit desktop from a neat idea to High Street stores, and now there's talk of Intel playing catch-up and remaking the Pentium with 64-bit extensions. Another downer is that any 64-bit chip owner will need Windows XP 64-Bit Edition to make the upgrade worthwhile, but this isn't out of preview yet. The Athlon FX-51 is more impressive than the P4 for gaming, but that's bound to change as Prescott's output is ramped up. But perhaps the new Windows will help AMD negate any Intel clock gains. In short, wait. Trust me on this.

**Q** Quick question: I've searched everywhere, including the Intel website, but I can't find out whether my Intel 82845G graphics controller is on the motherboard. If it is, can you please tell me how to disable it?

*George Ralph*

**A** Quick tip: look for what you think the answer might be and not what the question is. Searching at Google or at Intel for '82845G is an integrated chip' results in a whole bunch of pages, every one of which provides an answer. And you can disable it in your BIOS, under 'onboard video'.

DETONATOR set, but you're stuck with the most recent NVIDIA drivers – anything prior to version 50 won't recognise your 5950. Shame, as it's the most recent drivers that seem

to have exacerbated the stuttering problem for a number of people. [22]

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and you're done.

SIMPLY  
computers  
www.simply.co.uk



John Lewis



# WATCHDOG

Another month, another mailbag full of dudes in distress...

■ **WHITE KNIGHT** Adam Phillips

## ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

**WRITE TO** Watchdog, **PC ZONE**, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ

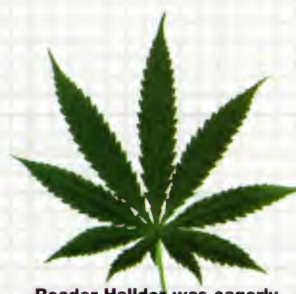
**EMAIL** Alternatively, email us at [letters.pczon@dennis.co.uk](mailto:letters.pczon@dennis.co.uk) with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

## READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please let us know your full name, address and contact number. With PCs, make sure that you also include all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

**"The replies I've had have done little more than try to fob me off, bidding me to be patient"**

ANDY CRITCHLOW ON EBUEYER



Reader Halldor was eagerly waiting on his pot replacement. (Er, is this right? – Ed)

## THE ACCUSED

ebuyer



THRUSTMASTER

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

## DOWNGRADED

The perfect card. For the perfect price. All seemed well for reader Ben Bowen when he ordered a Gigabyte Radeon 9800 Pro for £206 from Dabs' B-Grade stock. But alas, that means bugger all if it comes in packaging unfit for the job.

"The problem is that the card arrived loose within the packaging and I discovered little bits of black plastic with metal strips within its plastic packet," says Ben. "I've since discovered another microchip within the card package itself which looks like it came from the card."

Ben contacted Dabs about getting a replacement card but was told he could only have a refund because the item came from Dabs' B-Grade stock – items that are discounted because there's a minor problem with them i.e. there might be something missing such as the software or its user manual.

But Ben is having none of this: "I find it unacceptable that Dabs wouldn't offer a replacement card based on the fact that the card was badly packed and damaged in transit due to a mistake made by one of its members of staff."

Watchdog dropped Dabs a line: "We're sorry to hear Mr Bowen has had difficulties following his purchase of the B-Grade Gigabyte Radeon 9800 Pro from Dabs," the company says. "As with all B-Grade products, they are effectively sold as one-off items on our website. Because of this, should a B-Grade product prove faulty (or, as in this case, be damaged in transit), then in line with our advertised policy, we are unable to replace the item."

In the meantime, Dabs has offered a full refund. Watchdog has looked over Dabs' returns and warranty info for its B-grade stock and to be frank, Ben, its house seems to be in order.

## EH-BUYER?

"I'm not sure what to do next..." starts reader Andy Critchlow's frustrated complaint. Last June, he purchased a Gainward graphics card from Ebuyer and it was fine for the first six weeks. But soon, the fan started emitting a loud whirring noise, so Andy contacted the company.

"I eventually got an RMA from EBuyer and returned the card last September at my own expense – but that's the last I've seen of the card!" exclaims a bewildered Andy. "When I bought it, it was quite an expensive, nippy piece of kit. By the time I get it back – if I ever get it back – it will be nothing more than bargain-bin fodder."



# DOG



**E-buyer's customer care contact system – free with every purchase...**

Understandably, Andy is rather disappointed with Ebuyer: "The only contact the company's had with me during the whole affair has been by way of reply – I really believe it's content to let the matter slide into obscurity. And the replies I've had have done little more than try to fob me off, bidding me to be patient. Thing is, I think I have been patient."

Well, Ebuyer says that it was most concerned to receive your complaint from Watchdog. After all, it only took the company just over two weeks to get back to us with an official response...

"We've made our enquiries and have found that the customer returned the goods to us, and we returned the goods to Gainward for repair/replacement," say Ebuyer. "To this day, the goods have not been returned back to us and our returns department is investigating this. We've sent the customer a replacement which he will receive in the next couple of days. This is not the level of service we aim to give here at Ebuyer and we are sorry for any inconvenience caused."

We reckon that you deserve some kind of free upgrade after all the waiting, Andy, but alas, gestures of goodwill from companies are an increasingly rare thing these days...

## ANGRY AND THRUST-RATED

And finally, you'd think it would be simple enough to get support when you've splashed out \$290 on a luxury joystick – namely the Thrustmaster Cougar. Not according to one Halldor B Jonsson of Iceland. When he upgraded the

Thrustmaster-supplied software for the joystick, it essentially ended up knacker the joystick's highly sensitive potentiometer in the throttle unit.

Halldor sent off an email in September and despite various communications with Thrustmaster, he still hasn't received any kind of replacement in the post. "Thrustmaster technical support is leaving people with unusable hardware and I know I'm not the only case," says Halldor.

It took a while (a long while), but hallelujah, Thrustmaster did finally get back to us – and told us that, according to its R&D department, there's no established link between installing the new software and the damaging of the potentiometers: "Despite such a link seeming impossible, we will suggest on our website that customers unplug the TQS while flashing the firmware update. We know, however, that those users who have a cockpit may have a hard time unplugging their TQS. A new test will be conducted to secure the possibility of flashing without unplugging with the next firmware update release."

As for your faulty part, Halldor, Thrustmaster admits that at the end of September, it ran out of spare potentiometers. 600 new ones were announced in early October, but the transport company lost track of the delivery and ended up delivering plumbing components instead!

To rectify this, it's ordered new ones and these should have been sent out to customers by now – and that means you, Halldor. Thrustmaster apologises for any inconvenience caused. [X]

## IN THE DOG HOUSE

### THERE ARE SOME COMPANIES WHO BEHAVE LIKE THEY'RE BEYOND HELP. AND WE'VE GOT JUST THE PLACE FOR THEM...

Watchdog has been chasing after companies for years now – our main aim being to get wrangles between customers and companies resolved speedily. But there are those out there in customer care land who believe that silence is the best policy when approached by Watchdog.

But silence isn't something Watchdog responds to, so we've decided to expose these complaint-dodging companies. That way, you can decide whether or not to give them your hard-earned cash in the future...

### BAD DOG GAMESPLANET

**THE COMPLAINT** David Smith placed an order with GamesPlanet for a copy of *Micro Racers* for his son's birthday, but received nothing. When he enquired about his order, he was told it had been dispatched so he'd have to fill in a 'lost-

in-the-post' form. "I was advised the refund would follow shortly," explains David. "But I'm still waiting. I've sent GamesPlanet six emails to date, with no response. Telephoning the company was an utter waste of time. This was the first order I've ever placed with GamesPlanet – and it will be my last."

**THE PURSUIT** Watchdog fired off an email to an address GamesPlanet had responded to before. No luck, so we fired off another one. No luck again. Then we tried the number and were greeted by 'the person you are calling knows you are waiting...' And then we were cut off. Confidence-inspiring...

**THE VERDICT** No response and one ruined birthday. Has GamesPlanet been destroyed by a rogue Death Star? Hmm...

Microsoft

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# BUYER'S GUIDE

**A ton of money burning a huge hole in your pocket? Look here before offloading...**

Gone are the three categories of old, and in their place are three new ones. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy all of you, no matter what

you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a very worthy alternative. Finally, the Also

Consider product is one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your dipple. If you feel we've got something wrong, or

just want to add your tuppence ha'penny, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we'll be certain to shower you with gifts. Promise.

## EDITOR'S CHOICE

## RECOMMENDED

## ALSO CONSIDER

### MOTHERBOARDS



**IC7**  
STREET PRICE £88  
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.abit.com.tw](http://www.abit.com.tw)

Another solid and modern ABIT board with dual-channel memory configuration, two channel SATA with RAID, USB 2.0, 800FSB, plus 6-channel audio with S/PDIF. All cables included and it's overclocker-friendly, with a host of tweaking options in the BIOS. If you want high-speed networking, the IC7-G variant includes Intel Gigabit LAN on-board. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.



**K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)**  
STREET PRICE £75.50  
MANUFACTURER MSI  
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688  
WEBSITE [www.msi.com.tw](http://www.msi.com.tw)

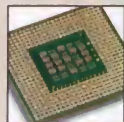
With the nForce2 chipset and the FSB wound up to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards like the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.



**875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)**  
STREET PRICE £116  
MANUFACTURER MSI  
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688  
WEBSITE [www.msi.com.tw](http://www.msi.com.tw)

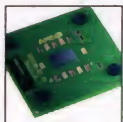
A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and packaging are excellent.

### PROCESSORS



**P4 3.2GHZ**  
STREET PRICE £209  
MANUFACTURER Intel  
TELEPHONE 01793 403000  
WEBSITE [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)

With the price of the 3.0GHz now well below £200, it makes sense to spend a bit extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory makes its presence felt. If you've got a P4 motherboard, chances are you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



**ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB**  
STREET PRICE £159  
MANUFACTURER AMD  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)

No, it's not as punchy as the hyper-threaded Pentium – but it's got a great price tag. Earlier 333FSB chips can be had for around the £100 mark, but with an nForce2 or better chipset and DDR400 memory, you can enjoy the speed boost from more recent XP chips. If you want to build a low-cost, high-power PC, get a cooking video card and the AMD chip will do you proud.



**P4 2.6GHZ**  
STREET PRICE £130  
MANUFACTURER Intel  
TELEPHONE 01793 403000  
WEBSITE [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)

We'd previously recommended Intel's 2.4GHz 800FSB chip, but recent price slicing means the 2.6GHz chip now makes most sense. Coupled with a decent motherboard, some top-class memory and an FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, you'll have a machine that's muscular enough to tackle all the latest games. If you're building a home games network and want big machines for hardly any money, look no further.

### HDDS



**WD1200JB 120GB**  
STREET PRICE £70  
MANUFACTURER Western Digital  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.westerndigital.com](http://www.westerndigital.com)

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



**DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB**  
STREET PRICE £54.50  
MANUFACTURER Maxtor  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.maxtor.com](http://www.maxtor.com)

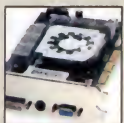
The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.



**RAPTOR 36GB**  
STREET PRICE £92.50  
MANUFACTURER Western Digital  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.westerndigital.com](http://www.westerndigital.com)

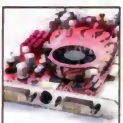
If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

### GRAPHICS CARD



**GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB**  
STREET PRICE £150  
MANUFACTURER nVidia  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.nvidia.com](http://www.nvidia.com)

The 5900 XT offers world-beating value – a top banana card packaged up with a mid-range price tag. In benchmarks, the 5900 XT is so far in front on power, it's snapping at the heels of big boys like the 9800 Pro. If you want a card that offers more frames per second per pound than any other, look no further. AGP is on its way out with a bang.



**ULTRA/960 GOLDEN SAMPLE 128MB**  
STREET PRICE £137  
MANUFACTURER Gainward  
TELEPHONE 01635 524949  
WEBSITE [www.gainward.co.uk](http://www.gainward.co.uk)

Two NVIDIA cards winning the value battle – who'd have thought it? ATI's domination of the sector started two years ago with the 9500, and nothing's come close since. Until now. The Golden Sample Gainward is faster than the Radeon and level pegs the 9600XT in benchmarks. It only lost its crown because of another GeForce, the 5900 XT, which is faster and better value still.



**RADEON 9800XT 256MB**  
STREET PRICE £309  
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [www.asus.com](http://www.asus.com)

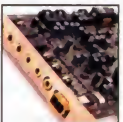
With a couple of NVIDIA cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we gave some space to one of the very fastest cards on the market – the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the necessary 300-quid rattling around in your back pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for Half-Life 2! Assuming it ever gets released...

### SOUNDCARDS



**REVOLUTION 7.1**  
STREET PRICE £90  
MANUFACTURER M-Audio  
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100  
WEBSITE [www.maudio.co.uk](http://www.maudio.co.uk)

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



**AUDIGY 2 ZS**  
STREET PRICE £85  
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.



**AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO**  
STREET PRICE £167  
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs  
TELEPHONE N/A  
WEBSITE [uk.europe.creative.com](http://uk.europe.creative.com)

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



## World's Most Powerful VGA ever...





# Worldwide No.1 VGA Card Manufacturer

## EDITOR'S CHOICE

## RECOMMENDED

## ALSO CONSIDER



### MX500

**STREET PRICE** £34

**MANUFACTURER** Logitech

**TELEPHONE** 020 7309 0127

**WEBSITE** www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



### OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

**STREET PRICE** £20

**MANUFACTURER** Microsoft

**TELEPHONE** 0870 6010 100

**WEBSITE** www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



### MX700

**STREET PRICE** £47

**MANUFACTURER** ACTURER Logitech

**TELEPHONE** 020 7309 0127

**WEBSITE** www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



### INTERNET NAVIGATOR

**STREET PRICE** £21

**MANUFACTURER** Logitech

**TELEPHONE** 020 7309 0127

**WEBSITE** www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



### INTERNET KEYBOARD

**STREET PRICE** £15

**MANUFACTURER** Microsoft

**TELEPHONE** 0870 6010 100

**WEBSITE** www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.



### PRO KEYBOARD

**STREET PRICE** £46

**MANUFACTURER** Apple

**TELEPHONE** 0800 0391 010

**WEBSITE** www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARDS



### CYBORG EVO

**STREET PRICE** £25

**MANUFACTURER** Saitek

**TELEPHONE** 01454 451900

**WEBSITE** www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



### CYBORG 3D GOLD

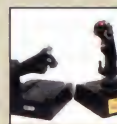
**STREET PRICE** £22

**MANUFACTURER** Saitek

**TELEPHONE** 01454 451900

**WEBSITE** www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.



### HOTAS COUGAR

**STREET PRICE** £249

**MANUFACTURER** Thrustmaster

**TELEPHONE** 020 8665 1881

**WEBSITE** www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICKS



### INSPIRE P580 5.1

**STREET PRICE** £53

**MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs

**TELEPHONE** N/A

**WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. This latest design includes a headphone jack at last too.



### Z-640

**STREET PRICE** £70

**MANUFACTURER** Logitech

**TELEPHONE** 020 7309 0127

**WEBSITE** www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



### MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

**STREET PRICE** £189

**MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs

**TELEPHONE** N/A

**WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



### CML174SXW

**STREET PRICE** £340

**MANUFACTURER** Hitachi

**TELEPHONE** 01628 585000

**WEBSITE** www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



### FLATRON L1710B

**STREET PRICE** £290

**MANUFACTURER** LG Electronics

**TELEPHONE** 01753 491500

**WEBSITE** www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place – things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



### VISIONMASTER PRO 514

**STREET PRICE** £498

**MANUFACTURER** Iiyama

**TELEPHONE** 01438 745482

**WEBSITE** www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and so ideal for gaming.

SCREENS



### APPLE IPOD 40GB

**STREET PRICE** £400

**MANUFACTURER** Apple

**TELEPHONE** 020 8210 1000

**WEBSITE** www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod – and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch too. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



### ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA

**STREET PRICE** £316

**MANUFACTURER** Archos

**TELEPHONE** N/A

**WEBSITE** www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



### MUVO 128MB

**STREET PRICE** £67

**MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs

**TELEPHONE** N/A

**WEBSITE** www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers) and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYERS

# FX5700



**MSI**  
MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL  
www.msi.com.tw





# MAILBOX

Like his lunchbox, Dave's mailbox is always bulging and ultra-tasty...

■ EARS PRICKED Dave Woods



## REALITY CHECK

I know that the team at PC ZONE appreciates constructive criticism, so here goes. WTF is that Reality Check feature all about? Complete bollocks. Stop it immediately and get on with what you're best at: bringing us previews and reviews of upcoming games, you tossers. I feel better for that. I'm glad I spent the time toning it down.

Tristian Trigg

PS: I want a new car or PC rather than a soundcard, thanks. Or a holiday somewhere exotic would be nice. Ta.

Tristian Trigg? WTF is that all about? Talk about stones and glasshouses – come back when you've got a proper name, sonny...

## SPELLING BEE

In a recent issue of PC ZONE, February 1994 (Issue 11), I noticed a typing error on page 101, where you wrote 'Sam aAnd Max' instead of 'Sam And Max'. I just thought you might like to know.

Jared Ashe

10 years to find a spelling mistake? I love your dedication but perhaps you should concentrate on playing games instead.

## SID

Why are women so quick to make the judgment that all male gamers are prejudiced towards women when playing games online? To be perfectly honest, I think women who make generalisations like this deserve to be discriminated against.

PC ZONE's own Suzy said: "I tend to play male characters in MMORPGs and don't really let

on I'm female in any other genre – I don't want to be treated any different to anyone else playing, so why mention it?"

Well, to a male you're very different: men act differently around women, full stop. Some show off, some act shy, some are perfect gentlemen, but that's who we are – we're male. It's human nature to act differently towards the opposite sex.

Now, the other type of male is the chauvinistic type who are just knobheads with a serious problem. Male gamers aren't chauvinists, but unfortunately chauvinists can play online.

So the question I want to ask these women is, what makes you so different from the male chauvinists if you go pointing the finger at men and making sweeping generalisations?

Scott Holmes

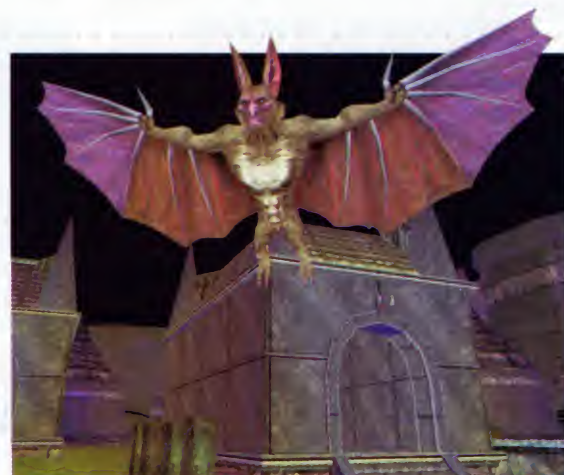
Suzy? "So basically, you're reaffirming my point that if I let on I'm female, I'll be treated differently? In real life, you might act differently towards women because you flirt or show off, but when the aim of the game is to shoot Nazis, what difference does it make? Are you going to flirt by presenting me with a large cache of grenades and some extra ammo? And as for making generalisations, it wasn't me pointing the finger – my mother's always told me that's a filthy male habit..."

## NNO-RPGS PPLEASE

Can you spare a thought for all the people who don't give a shit about MMORPGs please (if that's what they're calling them these days)? Who cares about a glorified chat program where nerds can meet up and kill monsters instead of going out and getting girlfriends? Have you ever met an EverQuest player? I have and he's a knob. Sort it out.

Adrian Taylor

How do you mean 'spare a thought'? Do you want a minute's silence? A moment of reflection where we can all



There's nothing wrong with playing EverQuest. Nothing.

focus our thoughts together against the evil MMORPGs? Can't do it I'm afraid – Paul Presley has said he'd go on strike and no-one else in the office has a beard.

## FANTASY ISLAND

In years gone by I was a dedicated PC gamer. However, over the past two or three years, the mix of an ailing PC, Gran Turismo 3, Metroid Prime, Zelda and other consoling distractions have meant I've been on a bit of a PC gaming sabbatical.

I've recently returned to the fold though, with a super-powerful PC. Since the turn of the year, I've been enjoying KOTOR, Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis and Call Of Duty. But in the last two weeks that's been overwhelmed by one game that's in danger of taking over from real life – Final Fantasy XI.

The scope and depth of this game just has to be seen to be believed. The world just comes across as... Well, complete. I've played some 20 hours so far and imagine that I've seen and experienced no more than 5 per cent of what's there.

Everything in the game is so well rounded – the environments, cities, real-time fighting,

Will Final Fantasy XI ever get released in the UK? We can only hope...

fighting in parties, communicating, trading, different races, jobs, weapons, abilities, clothing, crafts, auctions, shops, areas for exploration... (We get the picture! – Ed). All of the players I've come across seem the right sort too, always looking to help and give you tips. When are you going to review it?

Stolly

As soon as there are plans to release the game over here. You can currently import it and play on Japanese or US servers, but you won't get any after-sales support. Worrryingly, no European release has been announced yet, but fingers crossed...

## THE QUIMS

Why does everyone slate The Sims? Maybe it isn't to your own particular tastes, but doesn't the fact that the charts are filled with Sims titles every month mean they have some value to a large portion of the gaming public?

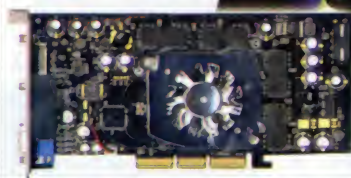
## WRITE US A LETTER AND WIN THE BEST GRAPHICS CARD MONEY CAN BUY!

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 9 DALLINGTON ST, LONDON EC1V 0BQ, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is the best graphics card we've ever reviewed and to prove it we've stuck a big fat Editor's Choice award round its neck. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?



WIN!  
A TOP  
GRAPHICS  
CARD





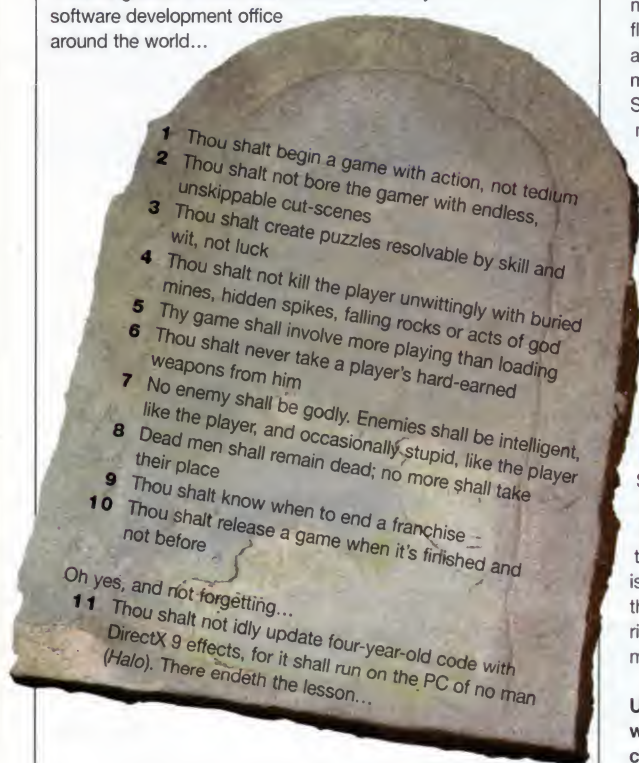
# "Teletext can do everything the Internet can, you can get it on your TV and it doesn't cost half your salary to connect to"

MATT SKINNER IS A PROUD LUDDITE

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

To be engraved in stone and mounted in every software development office around the world...



Amen. Thou shalt receive a soundcard for your efforts.

You can't deny that *The Sims* has inherent entertainment value can you? What better way of relieving the frustrations of a stress-filled day then by playing god to a houseful of virtual beings, causing them pleasure, pain, joy and misery in equal measures with the click of a button?

So please PC ZONE, stop dissing one of the most original, inventive and entertaining games of the last decade just because it's popular.

Vickie Heyes

Oh come now, we don't diss *The Sims*. Do we? Really? Oh, sorry. Next...

### 302

I've always hated the Internet. People have been banging on

more, you can get it on your TV and it doesn't cost half your month's salary to connect to.

Anyway, just thought you might like to see this screen that flashed up the other day. It was about a discussion for games mags and quite rightly you, and Steve Hill specifically, got a massive big-up. One of your rivals, *Edge*, didn't fare as well, unfortunately. Teletext rules, OK?

Matt Skinner

Teletext is one of the world's best inventions. Everyone knows that. As Steve Hill is always saying: "The Internet's a fad, just like the pogo stick." While Teletext is for life.

### MAN MOUNTAIN

Sad to hear that resident musclemann Martin Korda is leaving the magazine. Does this mean the PC ZONE team is now free from the constant threat of having their spines ripped from their bodies? Great mag, by the way.

Rob 'RockGod' Wilton

Unfortunately not. Martin's working for us in a freelance capacity now, which means he gets paid more, sleeps more and changes his underwear less. He's also in charge of the Supertest and if we don't contribute to the conversation in a meaningful manner, he's still apt to rip out our spines and play them like a glockenspiel. Bless him. [X]



Scientific proof that PC ZONE is the best games mag ever!

## BACKCHAT

THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PC ZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK



PC ZONE is good for you.

PC ZONE makes games better. No, we do. And if you read last month's issue, you'd know how and why. 101 ways to make games better-er and funner to play, a blueprint that, if followed by developers, would lead to a more fragrant world. For gamers at least. How would you make games better? That's the question we asked on the forums this month and these are the answers that we thought made the forums better.

In a post that almost made us weep at the cruel, cruel world we live in, *Fyska* urged developers to provide lonely gamers like him with a friend, someone to share life experiences with and possibly more. "AI in games should be so good that the characters learn to empathise with you as a player. That would be über. So basically, you'd have a virtual friend!" Bless. "MORE CREATIVITY!" screamed resident anarchist *PlumpOrgan*: "Get rid of the corporate side of games development. Anyone in a shirt and tie should generally stick to what they know rather than meddle with talent. If you look at most genre-defining games of the last decade, they've been spawned from teams who haven't had their creativity or time curtailed in any way. You'd think by now that suits would have learnt." Yeah! Down with McDonald's and the fuzz. "But what about Chuck Norris?" asked *escaped\_monkey*. "We need a game with Chuck Norris in." Something both *BackChat* and *PlumpOrgan* agree with wholeheartedly. "All my life, I knew there was something missing from games, but I just couldn't put my finger on it until you mentioned it. I'm off to rent *Missing In Action*." Good call.

The *Woodmaster* had a few suggestions: "Put some sort of stupid funny extra thing on the discs, get rid of games that only support specific cards, make every game easy to edit and stop multiplayer ending for old versions. *FIFA 2003* ceased to exist as a multiplayer game last November because all the servers switched to 2004. At least one server for the previous offering would be nice." Here, here. And remember folks, the battle against bad games isn't over until the last game comes good. Or something like that. Chuck?

## TXTCHAT

IT'S NEW! IT'S A TECHNOLOGICAL MARVEL! IT'S KICKING MAILBOX INTO THE 22ND CENTURY! IT'S TXTCHAT! (IT'S BLOODY WITCHCRAFT! - ED)

NEW!

Too lazy to send a letter? Too much of a luddite to be online? No worries, just text us your thoughts and we'll print them inside this box. All you have to do is send the keyword PCZCHAT to 83125, followed by your name and your comments, quips or angry rants. Keep them relatively short or we'll be forced to hack them to pieces. Please be aware that messages sent to TxtChat cost 50p plus your standard operator (text messaging) charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.



# THE PCZONE A-LIST

## SHOOTERS

### FAR CRY



**NEW ENTRY** A huge leap for PC gaming, *Far Cry* is also an absolute joy to play. With its long-range combat, shimmering shores, impressive enemy AI and seamlessly integrated physics engine it's the first shooter to show the potential of next-gen PC titles. The narrative may be slightly iffy, but the tension and exhilaration it instils in you makes the battle against the Trigens and their mercenary creators one of the best shooters in years.

**PUB** Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek  
**PCZ** ISSUE 140



#### CALL OF DUTY

*Call of Duty* is like the tour de force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear and excitement within you, there is no greater WWII experience.

**PUB** Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward

**PCZ** ISSUE 136



#### MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

**PUB** Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy

**PCZ** ISSUE: 136

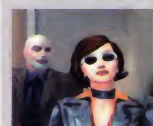


#### MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

It may have been toppled by *Call of Duty*, but *Allied Assault*'s set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.

**PUB** EA **DEV** 2015

**PCZ** ISSUE 112



#### NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

**PUB** Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith

**PCZ** ISSUE 122



#### HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

**PUB** Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software

**PCZ** ISSUE 71



#### UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around.

**PUB** Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes

**PCZ** ISSUE 138



#### UNREAL II

It takes a special game to beat the gorgeous visuals of *Unreal II*. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice-acting all exude quality too.

**PUB** Atari **DEV** Legend Entertainment

**PCZ** ISSUE 126



#### MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabang!

**PUB** Take 2 **DEV** Illusion

**PCZ** ISSUE 119



#### JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

The latest saber 'em up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended lightsabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

**PUB** Activision **DEV** Raven

**PCZ** ISSUE 133

## STRATEGY

### MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more.

Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

**PUB** Activision

**DEV** Creative Assembly

**PCZ** ISSUE 120



#### RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all-round freshness make *Rise of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.

**PUB** Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games

**PCZ** ISSUE 129



#### AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

**PUB** Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios

**PCZ** ISSUE 123



#### REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

**PUB** Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios

**PCZ** ISSUE 132



#### WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

*Warrior Kings* was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

**PUB** Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus

**PCZ** ISSUE 128

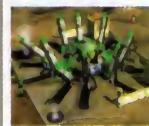


#### EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

**PUB** Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios

**PCZ** ISSUE 135



#### COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb-looking game with well-designed sides that offers fun in spades.

**PUB** EA **DEV** EA Pacific/Westwood

**PCZ** ISSUE 127



#### COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

**PUB** Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio

**PCZ** ISSUE 108



#### HOMEWORLD 2

The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.

**PUB** VU Games **DEV** Relic

**PCZ** ISSUE 134



#### WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

**PUB** VU Games **DEV** Blizzard

**PCZ** ISSUE 119



Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers

## ◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

### KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB: Activision DEV: Bioware  
PCZ ISSUE 137



#### DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm  
PCZ ISSUE 93



#### THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks  
PCZ ISSUE 117



#### NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they're still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware  
PCZ ISSUE 118



#### PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio  
PCZ ISSUE 87



#### DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games  
PCZ ISSUE 115



#### SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games  
PCZ ISSUE 80



#### BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential if PC role-playing's your thang.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware  
PCZ ISSUE 96



#### DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm  
PCZ ISSUE 137



#### DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios  
PCZ ISSUE 121

## ◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

### SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubisoft  
DEV Ubisoft Montreal  
PCZ ISSUE 125



#### BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

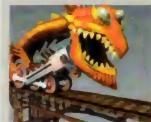
PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft  
PCZ ISSUE 138



#### PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal  
PCZ ISSUE 136



#### GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts  
PCZ ISSUE 71



#### SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami  
PCZ ISSUE 126



#### METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami  
PCZ ISSUE 127



#### SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Razei saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

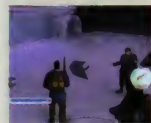
PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics  
PCZ ISSUE 111



#### DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and in our opinion, all the better for it.

PUB Atari DEV Perfect Entertainment  
PCZ ISSUE 79



#### THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks  
PCZ ISSUE 121



#### BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

It has its detractors, but nobody can deny that the third *Broken Sword* game seamlessly reinvents the traditional point-and-click into the realm of 3D. The dialogue may grate, but it's still well worth a look.

PUB THQ DEV Revolution  
PCZ ISSUE 136



## ◀ GOD GAMES ▶

## BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios

PCZ ISSUE 100

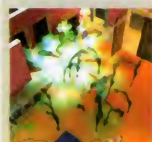


### CIVILIZATION III

*Civilization III* sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



### GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenille and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies

PCZ ISSUE 130



### THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87

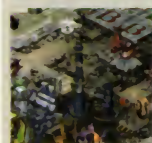


### VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A PC ZONE 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 135



### SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios

PCZ ISSUE 136



### CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions

PCZ ISSUE 70

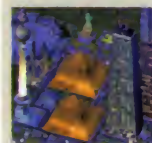


### EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



### SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125



### DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79

## ◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

## IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES



Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, along with more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft DEV 1C: Madox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128



### MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the bods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.

PUB Microsoft DEV Microsoft

PCZ ISSUE 133



### BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103

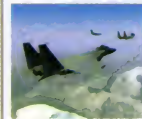


### SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

A flight sim with a strong emphasis on fun, rather than flaps, navigation and perfect landings. If you want some intense arcade action with an engaging console-style reward system, look no further.

PUB Activision DEV Lucasarts

PCZ ISSUE 137



### LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

It may not get the heart pounding as much as WWII sims, but *Lock On*, with vast terrain to explore and a huge range of enemies to explode at long range, is the best (and pretty much only) modern flight-fight game to buy.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Eagle Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 138

## ◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

## EVERQUEST



*EverQuest* keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117

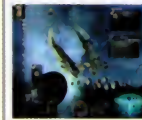


### PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *PlanetSide* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131

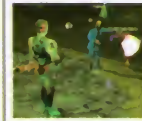


### EVE ONLINE

*Eve Online* is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial DEV CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130

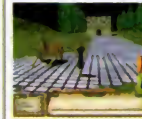


### ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, *Anarchy Online* is an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114



### A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis DEV eGenesis

PCZ ISSUE 133



## 3D ACTION / STRATEGY

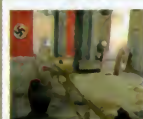
### OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

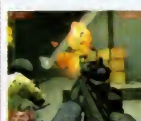


#### HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real *Boy's Own*-feel, a *ninja-bastard* difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136



#### RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127

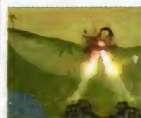


#### HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115



#### HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage DEV Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101

## SPORT

### CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04



A fresh season is added to the *CM4* canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 137



#### PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than *FIFA* in every conceivable way (bar the official licence of course), there is no greater footie experience available.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 136



#### VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114



#### TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision DEV Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98



#### TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

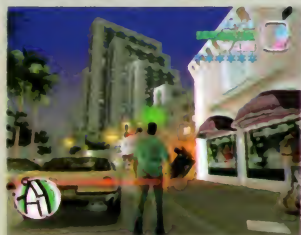
Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', you'll find it difficult to put down.

PUB EA Sports DEV Headgate Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135

## DRIVING GAMES

### GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131



#### GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



#### COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

**NEW ENTRY** More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fourth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With an excellent damage model and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best Rally game around.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 140



#### NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Illegal street racing, jazzed-up supercars and such a strong sense of speed that you yelp when you turn corners. *Underground* is a superbly designed and extraordinarily pretty tonic for testosterone-addled speed freaks.

PUB EA DEV Black Box

PCZ ISSUE 137



#### GRAND PRIX 4

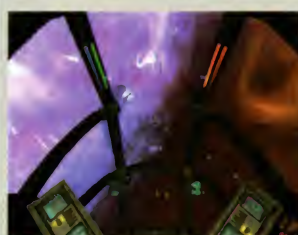
You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Atari DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119

## SPACE COMBAT

### X2: THE THREAT



Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138

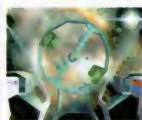


#### FREELANCER

*Freelancer* combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128



#### X - GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82



#### TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk DEV Vicarious Visions

PCZ ISSUE 93



#### FREESPACE 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay DEV Volition Inc

PCZ ISSUE 84



# DISC PAGES

## DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

I THINK,  
THEREFORE  
I AM  
(WOMAN)



## DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ Having participated in various discussions on the forum and having had to answer back to a reader's letter (see this month's Mailbox on p128), the subject of females that play games has been on my mind recently. Don't worry though, I'm not going to go on a huge rant – but I would just like to point out that women make up around 43 per cent of PC gamers, and that we are, apparently, very keen on a good strategy or RPG title. So there.

And this month we've got plenty of stuff for all you deep thinkers out there (both male and female), with exclusive demos of *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps* multiplayer, *Savage*, and the role-playing title *Beyond Divinity*.

But sometimes the act of having to actually think flies out of the window in favour of gunning people down. Don't worry, we're with you – check out our exclusive *kill.switch* demo, which provides you with the opportunity to mow down enemies while simultaneously cowering behind the safety of some crates. Like a coward.

And with *Far Cry* installed at the top of our A-List, it seems rude to leave you without another full level from the best shooter of all time. This one introduces the mutants and it's even better than the first demo we brought you – it's left me with the feeling that I like nothing better than blowing men's heads off with guns. I am woman. Hear me roar!



There are worse places to die a bloody death.

## FAR CRY

NEW  
DEMO

CD1/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Crytek Reviewed: Issue 140, 93%

The best shooter in the world is back! You've played the first demo, read our review and used the Kleenex – but if that's still not enough, we've managed to bag another exclusive single-player level for you. Good, eh? Frolic on the secluded beaches, gasp at the beautiful scenery and die at the hands of some rather inhospitable natives.

Your binoculars are an essential tool in *Far Cry*. Use them to peer through the thick foliage and identify and acquire targets that then show up

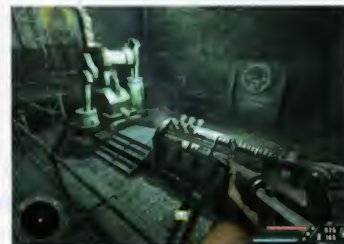
on your radar, or listen in on conversations. Take care at the start, though – you might be a fair way off from the mercs, but take a pot shot with your sniper rifle and the legendary AI will kick in,



Where's that Judith Chalmers then?

turning your slice of paradise into a holiday from hell.

Overlooking the secluded bay, a mortar also nestles comfortably at the top of the hill. This is a prime point to capture, enabling you to blast enemies all the way down to the quay, although the aiming does take a little getting used to. A couple of barrels nearby also provide a great opportunity to admire



Inside or out, Jack can do 'em all.



Snipe like a bastard.



Oh bugger...

developer Crytek's physics engine – push them down the

hill and squash any unsuspecting foes *Donkey Kong*-style.

Once you've neutralised the enemy (read as 'blow the shit out of them'), you'll see a dark passage tunnelled into the cliff of the bay. Once your eyes have finally acclimatised to the gloom, you can pick your way through some underground scenes, complete with mad gun-toting scientists and yet more mercenaries. The demo finishes with an all too-short glimpse of what you really wanted to see – the Trigenes. Run away!

## HELP!

**CD trouble?** Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08700 711482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email [pc\\_zone@interchange.co.uk](mailto:pc_zone@interchange.co.uk).

**BEFORE YOU DIAL...**

**If you're calling the helpline:**

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant

information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

## MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

## DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.

■ Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.



# DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS

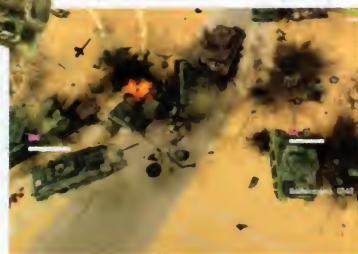
CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters Dev: Monte Cristo Reviewed: Issue 141, 70%

*Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps* steams its way onto our screens yet again with this multiplayer demo. The basic objectives are simple enough – capture the flags dotted about the terrain while reinforcements arrive every three minutes, the number of which are determined by the amount of flags under your control.

There are three self-explanatory modes available – Occupy All HQs, Kill All Enemies and Occupy Five HQs, and up to four of you can play together. It works on a peer-to-peer basis – if you know your friend's IP address, you can dial straight in – but otherwise, GameSpy is a good starting place.

Choose from one of the allied or axis forces and then select the make-up of your army, from troops to tanks, with a total number of selection points. On the

demo map, there are a total of five flags to possess and you should keep in mind that roads can be blocked by destroyed vehicles, forcing you to take longer routes to get to where you're heading. Each base is also heavily defended by mines, so if you want to take over the enemy base without sacrificing your entire battalion of tanks, you're going to need some sappers.



Tanks for the memories...



Flying high – but for how long?

# KILL.SWITCH

CD1/DVD Pub: Hip Games Dev: Namco/Bitmap Brothers Reviewed: Issue 140, 74%

Offensive cover. No, we're not talking about Louis Vuitton umbrellas, but the simplistically brilliant premise behind *kill.switch*: the ability to shove your gun-toting arm round a corner and shoot while your body remains in relative safety, all by the judicious use of the right mouse button. There

are two forms of 'blindfire' available – when crouching behind a box, you can fire over the top of it; and whenever you find your back against a wall, you can flatten yourself against it and fire round any corners you may encounter. Although not very accurate, this does enable you to keep enemies at bay, and is especially effective while they're out in the open.

Your character can also dive for cover with the space bar, meaning you can release a hail of bullets, dive to the next piece of cover and then begin all over again. Enemies aren't too shabby either, so expect to see them using the same tricks – if they manage to hog the best spaces for cover, lob them a few grenades for company.



Shooting without even bothering to look – now that's stylish.



Leaning: a masterful art.



Will the leaning ever end?



# BEYOND DIVINITY

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters Dev: Larian Studios

Reviewed: Issue 141, 71%



The Slimfast diet had taken its toll.

Do you want the good news or the bad? Actually, we only have the latter, so here goes... In this demo, despite the fact you're a wholesome adventurer who's dedicated his life to the cause of good,

you're soul-forged with a Death Knight and the two of you are now inseparable. Never mind, chin up...

A gruesome dungeon is the setting for this revelation (keep an eye out for decapitated heads and hands), and despite the unlikely union, you have to control both characters to escape. At any time you can be in control of either or both of the characters – the Death Knight being

the obvious choice for a killing machine – or your own player-created character.

The isometric action follows traditional RPG rules, so kill enemies to level up and increase your skillset, or add abilities such as spells. There are loads of weapons lying around too, but they wear out quickly, so make sure you've got a decent back-up. We'd also recommend saving on a regular basis: big bad enemies make an appearance every now and then, often without warning. And keep an eye out for the talking skull!

**"You're soul-forged with a Death Knight"**



Isometric: the best metric there is.



RPG like they did in the old days.



Wild bears are savage. As is this chap. And wolves.



The thinking man's shooter.



Fairy dust of death.

## SAVAGE

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters Dev: S2 Games

Reviewed: Issue 138, 80%

Check out these two maps from the massively popular FPS/RTS hybrid, in which you play as one of the troops on the ground or as the commander. The best way to get to grips with the RTS side is to host your own game and get your head around the technology trees.

You can have up to ten workers at a time and can use these to construct buildings and farm resources. Different paths are available to take – electrical, chemical and magnetic – with distinctly different weapons available for each, although if you get enough resources you can support all three.

Siege weapons are also available from the Siege Workshop, and these are essential for destroying enemy buildings. If anyone happens to jump onto your server on your side, you'll also be able to view requests from your on-foot players as they ask for different weapons, character types or buildings.

If this sounds like a load of hard work, absolve yourself from all responsibility and become a needy FPS player instead. Choose which garrison on the map to spawn at, select your weapons and get fighting. Your commander can issue orders – which you can ignore – but follow them and you'll get loyalty points.



It's not all guns y'know...

**PLUS: MODS FROM THE ONLINE SECTION, THIS MONTH'S FREE PLAY OFFERING, ALL THE LATEST PATCHES, EXCLUSIVE MUSIC AND ANIMATION FROM BLACK & WHITE 2 AND SOME AWESOME SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII VIDEOS TOO – WE RECKON IT COULD BE HUGE!**



# DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 114. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX

## THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is double-sided. Flip it over and you'll find The Essential Selection, which gives you the ten best demos of the last year (including *Far Cry*, *Max Payne 2* and *X2*), the five mods of the month, plus an exhaustive library of patches, drivers, utilities and modding tools. Everything you need to make your mates dead jealous, in fact.

## SPELLFORCE

**DVD Pub:** Big Ben **Dev:** Phenomic **Reviewed:** Issue 137, 79%

Why can't people just get along? In *Spellforce*, the Red Legion is fighting with the Briar Wolves over the local water supply. You've helped out the Red Legion before and now they're asking for your assistance again. Get help from the rune monument nearby, through which you can summon workers and fighters to your cause. But there's a catch. The rune monument is an orc one, which means your army is green-skinned and none

too clever. Make sure you keep them away from the people you're trying to help as they don't really mind who they're slaying, as long as they're slaying.



Could it be magic?



Briar Wolves. Briar Rabbit. Briar Fox.



## WARLORDS BATTLECRY III

**DVD Pub:** Enlight **Dev:** Infinite

More RTS action where you play as either the dwarves or the swarm (an insect-like race). The Desert Sands map is as it sounds, with a barren landscape and one enemy force. If you're feeling a bit braver, load up the Valley Of The Dead map – it has a central square with undead catacombs which spits out mini-armies of undead legions.

Not being one to sit back, your hero is an essential tool in battle and can also construct and convert buildings to your side. Progress through the research tree rewards you with bigger and better buildings and troops – and you'll need them, as towers are almost essential to fend off skirmishing enemy parties.



Stock RTS screenshot no.348.



Wouldn't happen in real life...

## GANGLAND

**DVD Pub:** Whiptail Interactive **Dev:** MediaMobsters  
**Reviewed:** Issue 141, 59%

A bit of an odd one this. An RTS/RPG hybrid, *Gangland* plays more like an arcade shooter. You choose to play as one of four brothers in Paradise City and the ultimate aim is to kill the other three. In the demo you have to track down your uncle Vincenzo Mangano,

who sets you a series of tasks to complete for cash. You also get a lump sum at the start of each to buy ammo and recruits. From street women with mace to henchmen with tommy guns, these sidekicks can be found hanging about in your local bar. Just like real life.



Lovely shiny balls.



Fancy a game, love?

## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004

**DVD Pub:** Jaleco **Dev:** Blade Interactive

You play as Earl 'The Pearl' Strickland against a scantily-clad Alison Browne, in either eight-ball (standard British fare) or nine-ball pool (whoever pots the nine ball wins). The cueing aid (aka Jamie Sefton's stabilisers) can be

switched on or off, depending on how much Dutch courage you've managed to muster via the bar in the background. When you've beaten Alison (at pool), she'll begrudgingly show you how to perform a trick shot or two.

## UNREAL II: XMP COMMUNITY BONUS PACK

This fantastic *XMP Community Bonus Pack* has been lovingly crafted by some of the community's best level designers. Featuring ten of the best maps and seven neat little mutators, it should provide you with so much extra content for *XMP* that you might even be able to defer buying *UT2004* for a while! Then again...

## MODS OF THE MONTH

A new regular in the Essential Selection, Mods of the Month features the best mods of the month. Remember, the Essential Selection is located on side two of your DVD – if you're having problems locating it, eject the DVD, flip it over and stick it back in your drive.

**ALSO ON THE DVD...** ALL THE LATEST PATCHES, MOVIES AND MODS, PLUS EXCLUSIVE MOVIES OF *SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII* AND *KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE*, AN EXCLUSIVE PEEK AT SOME *BLACK & WHITE 2* GOODIES, DEMOS OF *CASTLE STRIKE*, *AIM*, *CAT IN THE HAT*, *SONIC ADVENTURE DX*, *COLISEUM* AND THIS MONTH'S GAME THAT CHANGED THE WORLD, *HOMEWORLD*. PHEW!





GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

# HOMEWORLD

One small step for games, one giant leap for strategy gaming. *Richie Shoemaker* looks back at one of the most epic, intense and evolutionary RTS games of the space age

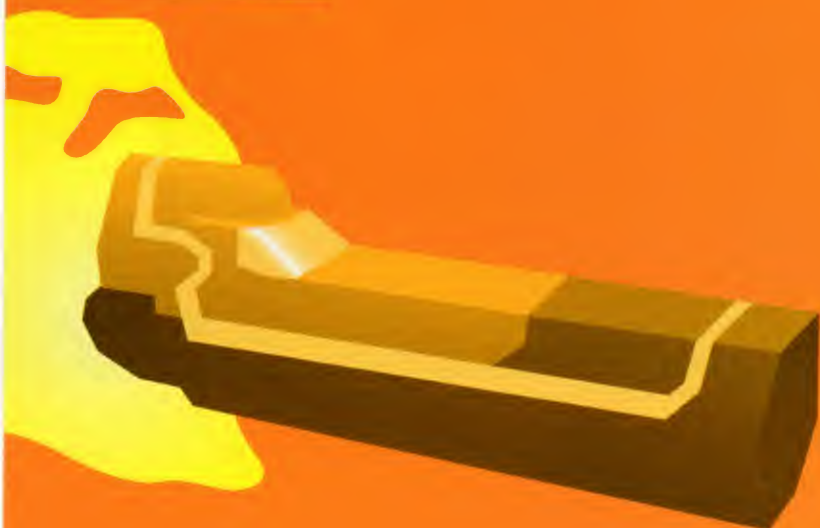


The look of *Homeworld* is as distinctive as its gameplay.



The developers called it 'Spaghetti Ball', owing to the engine trails.





**GAME** Homeworld  
**DEVELOPER** Relic Entertainment  
**PUBLISHER** Sierra

**RELEASED** September 1999

**INFLUENCED** Back in 1999, 3D strategy games were nothing new, and most varied little from the tried-and-tested formula – even the few space-bound games around at the time were flat and featureless. *Homeworld* changed all this, managing to almost single-handedly create a new dimension to explore – and its control system remains one of the most intuitive and powerful tools ever devised for the armchair strategist. *Haegemonia*, *O.R.B.* and *Nexus* (due out later this year) are just a few examples of games that have followed in its footsteps.

**SOME** would say space games have had their day. What started with *Elite*, exploded with *Wing Commander* and lived on through *Privateer*, *X-Wing*, *Freespace* and a galaxy of other lesser-known stars has now virtually imploded on itself. The genre that gave us our first proper 3D worlds and would later usher in a decade of PC dominance is in sharp and irreversible decline. Were it not for the efforts of a rag-tag crew of independent developers and a couple of niche hits like *X: Beyond The Frontier* and its recent sequel, we'd probably be drawing a crisp white sheet over the face of the genre, sealing it in a hollowed-out torpedo tube and propelling it out into the infinite black beyond.

But if you think about it, it's only the simulation side of the genre that's died out (and in truth that never had much life anyway). Space combat, on the other hand – now that's another story. We may have swapped our joysticks for mice and our lone star-fighters for entire fleets of cruisers and fighters, but otherwise it's business as usual.

Space is still very much the place, and if there's one game we

should be thanking, it's deep-space masterpiece *Homeworld*.

While at its core *Homeworld* was a real-time strategy game, replete with harvesting, resource management, research and the command of vast fleets of ships, its single most obvious influence was the epic space battles of *Star Wars*.

#### THE FINAL FRONTIER

The 'thread' of its conception, as Alex Garden terms the original idea, evolved quickly from a night of friendly discussion over the lack of epic-scale space battles in current games. At the time, early in 1997, *X-Wing Vs Tie Fighter* was high on the young programmer's playlist, and being a huge fan of all things *Star Wars* and *Battlestar Galactica*, it wasn't long before the seed of a game began to germinate. In May the same year, Alex maxed out his credit cards, roped in a couple of mates and formed a new development studio above a rowdy nightclub in Vancouver, Canada. He dubbed his new project 'Relic Entertainment'.

"The first year of Relic's life was a huge struggle," says Alex. "It was

#### PROFILES

Alex Garden began his career working as a 15-year-old game tester for Distinctive Software in Canada. While there he met Chris 'Total Annihilation' Taylor and the two became friends. "Chris lent me the money to buy my first computer," remembers Alex. "He ended up teaching me most of what I knew about programming too." Encouraged by his friend, Alex formed Relic Entertainment in Vancouver in 1997. The first employee he hired was designer Erin Daly, who soon became an invaluable part of the burgeoning company.



**NAME** Alex Garden  
**ROLE ON HOMEWORLD** Director  
**FIRST GAME WORKED ON** John Madden Football '93 for the SNES.

**WHERE IS HE NOW?** Still running the show at Relic, Alex has three projects in development, one of which is *Warhammer 40K: Dawn Of War*.



**NAME** Erin Daly  
**ROLE ON HOMEWORLD** Lead designer  
**FIRST GAME WORKED ON** A failed third-person console action game called *DeadSpace*.

**WHERE IS HE NOW?** At Relic, working on a 'secret project'.



## THE FUTURE

## WHERE DO WE HYPERSPACE FROM HERE?

Since Sierra made the mistake of announcing *Homeworld 2* a year before it had anything to show, the publisher (now part of VU Games) is understandably cagey about letting slip any intention to carry on the series. A disappointing and wholly predictable critical reception for *HW2* may not be enough to scupper the series for good, but it looks like any potential



Nexus is due this year.

*Homeworld 3* will happen without Relic at the helm.

"Relic and VU Games/Sierra have no plans to produce work together at this time," says Alex rather sternly. "We're no longer in a position to shape the future of the *Homeworld* universe. You'd have to ask Sierra about its plans."

Whether or not a second *Homeworld* sequel emerges, there are plenty of other developers eager to carry on the legacy with their own efforts. Promising tributes have already arrived in games like *Far Gate*, *Project Earth*, *O.R.B.* and *Haegemonia*, but of those around or close to release, the only real contender to the throne is *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident*, the game previously known as *Imperium Galactica III*.



The game was heavily influenced by *Battlestar Galactica* and prog rock.

chaotic. We were all young, inexperienced and naive.

Since there weren't really any games we could look at and say 'oh, that's how you do 3D RTS games', we really had to invent everything from scratch. If we'd known from the start how hard it was going to be, I seriously doubt that we would've had the courage to try in the first place."

"Inexperience is a double-edged sword," chips in Erin Daly, lead designer on *Homeworld* who had the then-dubious honour of being Relic's first employee. "It brings passion, exuberance, zeal and many other things that make a great game. The prevailing attitude among the founders of Relic was 'if we can't do something amazing, let's not do it at all'. We were never interested in doing something that would be an incremental improvement over the other RTS games. It was this attitude and Alex's extremely persuasive personality that convinced many talented people to leave their secure jobs for a start-up company making a high-risk game."

## COMMAND AND CONTROL

Aside from issues of non-existent funding, inexperience and lofty ambition, Relic's most telling problem was how to implement a control system that would enable players to control dozens of ships in a dynamic, seemingly boundless and potentially confusing 3D universe. The solution created was brilliant in its simplicity: whatever unit or item you clicked on became your focal point, and your point of view

became fixed to an imaginary sphere around that object. You could rotate your camera anywhere around the surface of that sphere, as well as shrinking or enlarging the sphere to zoom in and out.

"With a fully 3D game world, we had to break the paradigm of the standard fixed camera angle RTS control scheme," says Erin. "Since most players have little time to learn new control systems, anything that doesn't follow well-established user interface conventions is often perceived as difficult. We found players who had very little exposure to top-down RTS games had an easier time learning the controls to *Homeworld*. Looking back, however, it was definitely a big mistake not to include panning in the first *Homeworld*. We were afraid people would get lost too easily, with the lack of reference points in space."

"Actually," adds Alex, "we had the basic control scheme nailed on day one – that was one of our advantages. Then ironing out the details on that basic scheme was a simple two-year task..."

## CAN YOU GUESS WHAT IT IS YET?

With the core control device in place, the rest of the game mechanics could begin to take shape. Interestingly, the game's single-player campaign was left largely untouched throughout this period (apart from the *Battlestar Galactica*-like storyline), with the broad game

mechanics all being thrashed out in the multiplayer design.

"RTS games are usually built with multiplayer working first," reveals Erin. "This allows the development team to test out game mechanics, interface ideas and the like before the single-player game is even worked on."

"*Homeworld* was no different in this respect. However, the multiplayer game was one area where our inexperience did hurt us. Since we had little experience balancing RTS games, and *Homeworld* was built as a fully 3D game world, tuning the game was like tuning a physics simulation. If you wanted the Heavy Corvettes to hit the Bombers more often, you couldn't just increase the weapon accuracy. You had to tune the speed of the Heavy Corvette's bullets, the tracking rate of their gun barrels, the speed of the Bombers and so on. It was a very complex system and made it more difficult than it should have been to achieve a decent game balance."

Because of the balancing issues, work on the single-player game dragged further and further behind.

Hope that the game would take under 18 months to complete soon vanished, and *Homeworld* was well into its second year before Relic started tackling the solo missions. Alex was unconcerned, though, believing the campaign could be completed in a few weeks by just a handful of team members. In the end, the campaign was indeed completed quickly, but many of the team's original ideas had to be scaled back as a result.

"We originally had grandiose plans for a more freeform single-player game where you could explore the universe on your own and engage in much more elaborate trading," says Erin. "In the end we went with a linear campaign – this sacrificed a lot of player freedom, but gave us more of the

**"The basic control scheme was nailed on day one – ironing it out took two years"**

ALEX GARDEN RELIC ENTERTAINMENT







In action, the game was surprisingly psychedelic.



"She cannae take much more of this, cap'n."



There was a choice of two races in single-player, but the campaign for each was identical.

immersiveness we wanted."

"We had a document we called 'littledetails.doc' that started off as a place to put suggestions for the game if we had time to implement them," remembers Alex. "I think that by the time we shipped, it was something like ten pages long. All the things that we left out were largely due to the time factor. Anyone following *Homeworld's* development will be familiar with the delays. We just ran out of time."

#### LAUNCH PAD

After an intense and successful multiplayer beta test, the coding of the required demo and a hugely successful showing at E3, *Homeworld* was finally complete and ready for release in

September 1999. Despite a relatively low-key launch, sales were brisk, surpassing the 250,000 mark within a few weeks. The game featured on the cover of *PC ZONE* and the *Homeworld* issue became the biggest-selling issue ever. Clearly Relic hadn't just created a very good strategy game, it had also tapped into the imaginations of gamers worldwide – in the process spawning a million-selling franchise and garnering dozens of awards.

Alex, however, was unimpressed. "We were so confident that we'd succeed, I think we were a bit surprised the game didn't do better than it did," he laughs. "Ah, the arrogance of youth. Honestly though, our biggest error with *Homeworld* was holding off with *Homeworld 2*. We should have re-used our existing code-base to ship a version

two within one year of the original."

Instead, the opportunity to expand upon *Homeworld* fell to fellow Canadian developer Barking Dog Studios, famous for its work on the crucial beta five of *Counter-Strike*. *Homeworld: Cataclysm* did use the existing code-base and shipped within a year.

"*Cataclysm* was entirely Barking Dog's design and they should receive full credit for it," says Erin. "They brought a number of gameplay and interface enhancements to the franchise that received a lot of praise. Actually, it's not uncommon to hear fans on the Relic forums say they prefer *Cataclysm* over the original."

#### SEQUELITIS

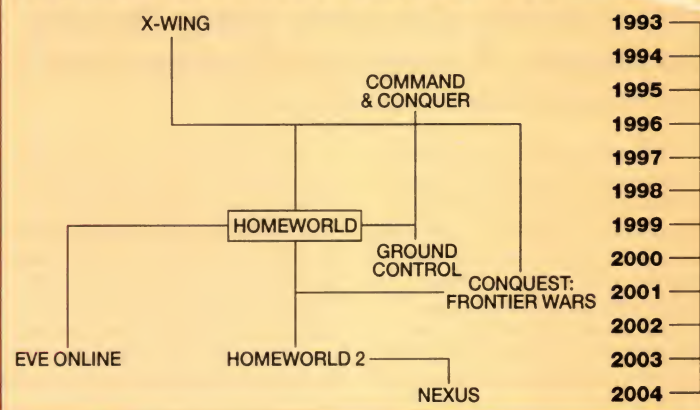
Clearly, Relic had to go one better than its protégés when the team eventually embarked on a true sequel.

"*Homeworld* pushed the envelope so far that people expected *Homeworld 2* to go even further," says Josh Mosqueira, lead designer on the space sequel. "Initially, this was the goal for Relic as well: to take *Homeworld* to the next level. However, not everyone agreed what the next level was and this led to some false starts. This is a problem that plagues many sequels – instead of iterating and refining, they attempt to reinvent the wheel."

Josh continues: "However, what *HW2* offered was a refined and more polished game experience. Instead of trying to push the envelope, we learned from the mistakes of *Homeworld* and focused on making a more accessible game that captured the essence of the

#### FAMILY TREE

Like most great games, *Homeworld* has spawned countless imitators in a surprisingly short space of time, but there have been a few decent efforts among them. In terms of control interface, *Homeworld's* influence reaches much further, paying homage to the space combat and strategy genres it originally borrowed from.



first. *Homeworld's* innovation created an expectation that *HW2* would be an innovative and not iterative product. However, most critics were silenced once they started playing *HW2* and saw first-hand the improvements to gameplay and the engine. We wanted to recapture the gestalt of the first game, not radically change it."

Wherever Relic decides to take us next in *Homeworld*, if at all, its contribution to sci-fi gaming cannot be underestimated. Though to its detractors the game is seen as little more than *Command & Conquer* in space with a storyline borrowed from a long-dead '70s TV series, there can be no dismissing the fact that Relic not only

succeeded in displaying vast on-screen battles not seen since the days of disco, it also managed to tally deep strategy with immersive storytelling. What's more, and most significantly of all, it was the first developer to finally nail a 3D control interface, one designed for a 3D universe rather than a 2D one.

"Other people consider *Homeworld* ground-breaking and I'm told it's inspired a new generation of developers," says Alex modestly. "In that sense, I'm proud. But the most gratifying part of it all is that we had a dream, we worked hard and that dream came true. Nothing in the world is more satisfying." [E3]





# THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

Music and sound are two elements often criminally neglected in modern games – not so in *Black & White 2*. John McLean-Foreman conducts...



## WE ALL

remember games that played music in endless loops – you

know, the ones you played all day and whose songs filled your dreams all night. Granted, some of them were great, but others were so abysmal that even 20 years on, I still break into a sweat at the merest thought of them. Thankfully, our resident sound guy, Craig Beattie is intent on pushing the musical boundaries of *Black & White 2* beyond anything that Lionhead has ever done before.

So far, he's written and recorded more than 250 original pieces of music that change from town to town, race to race and alignment to alignment. If you only ever play the game once, there'll be dozens of songs that you'll never get the chance to hear.

**“There are 250 original pieces – so if you only play the game once, there'll be dozens of songs you'll never hear”**

JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD

One idea I particularly liked from the first game was that as you shifted back and forth between alignments, the music shifted with you. This meant that the more evil or good you were, the more evil or good the music became. To do this gradually, the game would layer two pieces of music on top of one another, allowing the more appropriate alignment-based tune to dominate. So, if you were

spiralling into the depths of wickedness, the evil music would take over and the neutral music fade into the background.

While that was a very cool idea, it was also very limiting. All the music had to be written in the same key and sound similar, and your alignment changed so slowly that nobody got to appreciate the technology morphing it. Subsequently, it could become repetitive, which is what Craig is striving to avoid in *B&W2*.

## RAMP IT UP

So, how do you remove the limitations of morphing music while still convincing the player that the game alters to reflect their personal playing style? Craig's solution is to simply increase the number of alignments from three to five. Add two new alignments – Neutral-Evil and Neutral-Good – and simply switch the music at the appropriate moments, with no morphing or layering necessary. Now every alignment has totally unique music.

There are nine songs per alignment, five alignments and five races. That's a total of  $9 \times 5 \times 5 = 225$  songs for the alignment shifts alone. The reason that we can have so many is because Lionhead insists on having a composer involved from the very beginning of the project, rather than bringing someone in to cram everything in at the end. This means that Craig can create the music with the same

ambitions as the rest of the game: dynamic and changeable.

For example, there are many elements that trigger musical changes during a battle. These include the intensity of fighting, number of people involved, who's winning, how important the battle is and what stage it's at – not to mention important events like breaching the walls and defences of your enemy. Allowing for all those variables takes a great deal of time.

When you write music for a game, there are two ways to do it. First, the composer writes the music beforehand and passes it to an orchestra who then perform and record it. Job done. The second method is to compose the music using a computer. The first method is easier, but once it's done, that's it. The second method is harder, but allows for last-minute changes. Sadly, it doesn't normally sound as beautiful as a real orchestra. Now, Craig wants the best of both worlds, which means equipment and software (five computers, *Orchestral Cube* and *GigaStudio*). This gives him the ability to create an orchestral piece without the use of an orchestra.

## FROM A DISTANCE

With all the technology that's now available to us, we can really go to town with the number of sound effects too. Currently we've got well over 10,000 effects planned. The reason we need such a high number is because *B&W2* enables you to get as close or as far away from the action as you like.

For example, when you're a fair distance from a town's pub, you'll only be



**Music makes the people come together. And kill each other.**

able to hear the general noise you would expect (the type of noise and rowdiness differs between day and night too). As you get closer, you'll be able to discern more and more sounds: individual conversations and chatter, the clinking of glasses and so on.

As for new new sound effects like the Creature roars, Craig creates them by starting with a huge library of pre-recorded sounds, then altering them with a program called *Sound Forge*. He plays them backwards, changes the pitch, layers them with other sounds, adds an echo, puts in stutters, speeds the sounds up, slows them down and so on. A great deal of what he does involves trial and error and a willingness to discard what doesn't work.

Take the Creatures' footsteps. In order to make them seem huge, Craig tried out a whole bunch of different effects, but nothing was quite right – until he experimented with sounds of explosions. They've all been shortened now, altered and fiddled with, but they're just how you would imagine a 20-storey Creature should sound: BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Frankly, I don't know how Craig keeps it all together in his head. Piecing this sound with that, randomising that noise with another and getting it all to play so that all the sounds complement one another is a real skill and something I'm looking forward to experiencing over and over again in the game. I've long believed that top quality music and sound can make all the difference in a game, and in *Black & White 2*, we'll all see just how far Craig can go. **[P2]**

Check our cover discs for an exclusive animation and music from *Black & White 2*.



Hey, Mr DJ: Craig Beattie mixes some choons.



This battle will sing.



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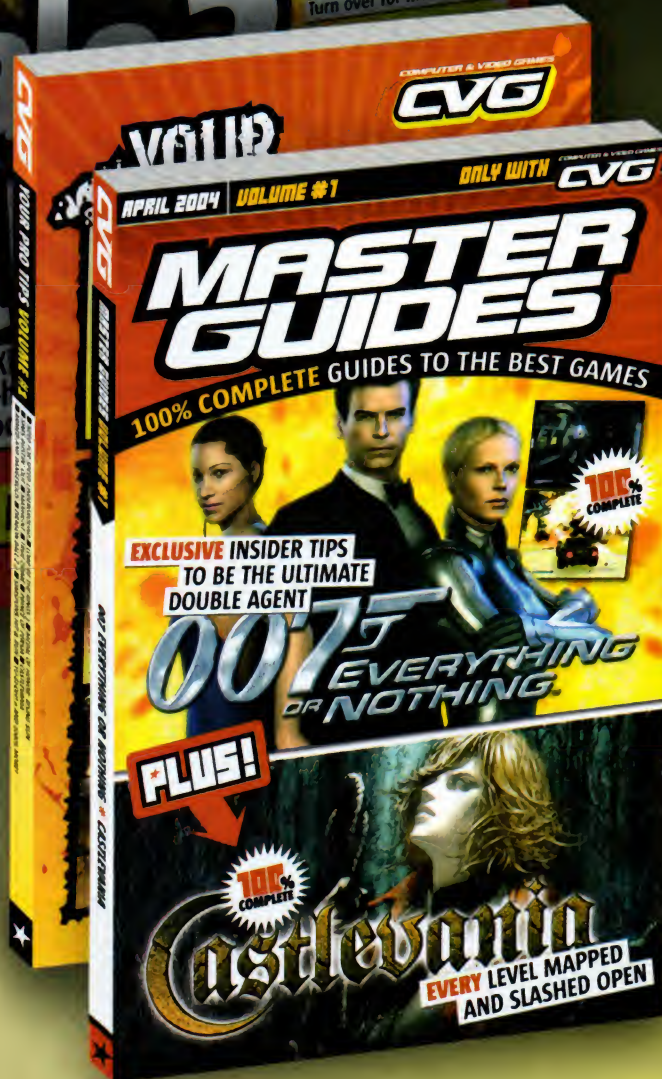


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# RETRO ZONE

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## INTERSTATE '76

The funkiest game on four wheels



'I Love 1976' - featuring space hoppers, Abba and murder.



WHEN IT comes to vehicular slaughter, one immediately thinks of titles like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Carmageddon*, both games having secured themselves a place in gaming history thanks to some inspired marketing-led controversy (and decent gameplay, of course). However, for all the carnage and gore that was wheeled out, neither game - nor their sequels - could shake their



*Grand Theft Auto*. In flames.

things quite like *Interstate '76*. Driven by one of the grooviest, original soundtracks of all time, the game was set in an alternate post-apocalyptic America where lawless gangs ruled the highways in tank tops, while you and your wide-trousered soul brothers set out to thwart them. It was, to all intents and purposes, a Tarantino-inspired take on *Mad Max*. *Pulp Traction*, if you will. Sadly, the reality failed to live up to

A truly retro game.

the promise, partly because of the poor performance of the 3D engine, partly thanks to a few show-stopping bugs, but mostly because *Carmageddon* had hogged all the limelight for four-wheeled combat. It had bass-slapping to compensate, but *Interstate '76* didn't allow for what the baying masses wanted: pedestrian slaughter. And so, despite a cracking add-on a year later, the title slid slowly into obscurity. *Driv3r*, *Vice City*... Show some respect.

**"Interstate '76 didn't allow for what the masses wanted: pedestrian slaughter"**

RETRO  
ZONE  
JUNE  
1997

Funk soul brother  
Richie Shoemaker  
steps into the gaming  
Tardis



### NEWSFLASH

IT'S JUNE 1997 AND...

- id Software unveils its new 3D engine powering *Quake II*, while Hypnotic Software (famous for *Quake* add-on *Scourge Of Armagon*) announces the *Quake*-powered shooter *Sin*.
- Still with first-person shooters, id renegade Jon Romero unveils his ubershooter. It's called *Daikatana* and is described by the man as "a shooter with beat 'em up elements", due for release around Christmas 1998.
- Meanwhile, 3D Realms announces that *Duke Nukem Forever* will be using the *Quake* engine. "It made sense to go with *Quake* instead of *Unreal* because it's the finished engine," said Scott Miller, referring to the fact that *Unreal* was still a year from release. Two further *Quakes*, four *Unreals*, two *Half-Lives* and a *Doom* later...
- EA announces it'll be cashing in on *SimCity* once more with a driving game called *Streets Of SimCity*, in which you get to drive around cities created in *SimCity 2000*. Considering there were no curved roads in *SimCity*, the game turned out pretty much as we expected...

### THE BEST OF THE REST



#### REDNECK RAMPAGE

(PC)  
Or, to give the game its unofficial title, *A Duke Too Far*. Instead of a misogynist meathead, you played an in-bred banjo boy whose aim was to rid the Deep South of pig-rustling aliens. Whacking Bubba around the face at the end of each level was entertaining, but like all humour based upon ceaseless stereotyping, it all wore a bit thin after a couple of hours.



#### STAR WARS: X-WING VS TIE FIGHTER

(PC)  
It should have been the best of both worlds: the Rebel Alliance and the dark Empire in one almighty galactic-wide war - and you were able to side with either. Online, it lived up to this potential (to a point) and the graphics at last did the series justice - but unfortunately, the single-player game was woefully inadequate.



#### THE LAST EXPRESS

(PC)  
Devised by the bloke behind *Prince Of Persia*, this curious first-person adventure featured real actors overlaid by hand-drawn animation stills. The effect was overly stylised, but the game itself was beguiling. Set in real-time, the characters went about their business regardless of how quickly you progressed, lending the game depth that few adventures have achieved since.



#### MARIO KART 64

(N64)  
The SNES classic *Super Mario Kart* remains one of the finest examples of couch-multiplayer gaming - so when the N64 came along, it was a given that the Big N would update the Miyamoto classic for its new machine. Sadly, while it looked good, it felt different, slower somehow, but we loved it all the same. Peachy!



**IN MY CAREER IN THE NYPD I'VE SINGLE-HANDEDLY BROUGHT DOWN TWO CRIMINAL EMPIRES, STOPPED THE DISTRIBUTION NETWORK OF THE KILLER DRUG 'V', UNCOVERED A MASSIVE GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACY, THROWN OFF ACCUSATIONS OF MURDERING MY PARTNER AND GONE ON TO RID NEW YORK CITY OF HUNDREDS MORE GUN-TOTING MANIACS.**

**OVER THE YEARS I'VE BEEN BLOWN UP, SET ON FIRE, HURLED FROM THE TOPS OF HIGH BUILDINGS, BEATEN WITH A BASEBALL BAT AND HAVE TAKEN APPROXIMATELY 230 GUNSHOT WOUNDS TO THE HEAD AND SURVIVED WITH VERY LITTLE VISIBLE SCARRING. I'VE ALSO BEGUN SOME PROMISING THERAPY TO DEAL WITH A WORRYING PAINKILLER DEPENDENCY.**

**I'VE KILLED EVERY SINGLE AVAILABLE GANGSTER IN THE NEW YORK TRI-STATE AREA AND SAVED THE TAX PAYER MILLIONS OF DOLLARS THAT WOULD HAVE OTHERWISE BEEN WASTED BY PRISONS, BORING LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AND EXTRA POLICING. I'VE ALSO SURVIVED THE LOSS OF MY BEST FRIEND, MY WIFE, MY BABY, MY PARTNER, MY BOSS, MY NEIGHBOURS, MY WORKMATES AND ASSORTED PROSTITUTES AND TRAMPS.**

**BUT GETTING PAID TO SLOUCH AROUND IN T-SHIRT AND JEANS, PLAYING GAMES ALL WEEK, WHILE TRYING TO TRICK MY COLLEAGUES INTO MAKING ME A CUP OF TEA?**

**I DON'T THINK I COULD DO THAT.**

**COULD YOU?**  
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